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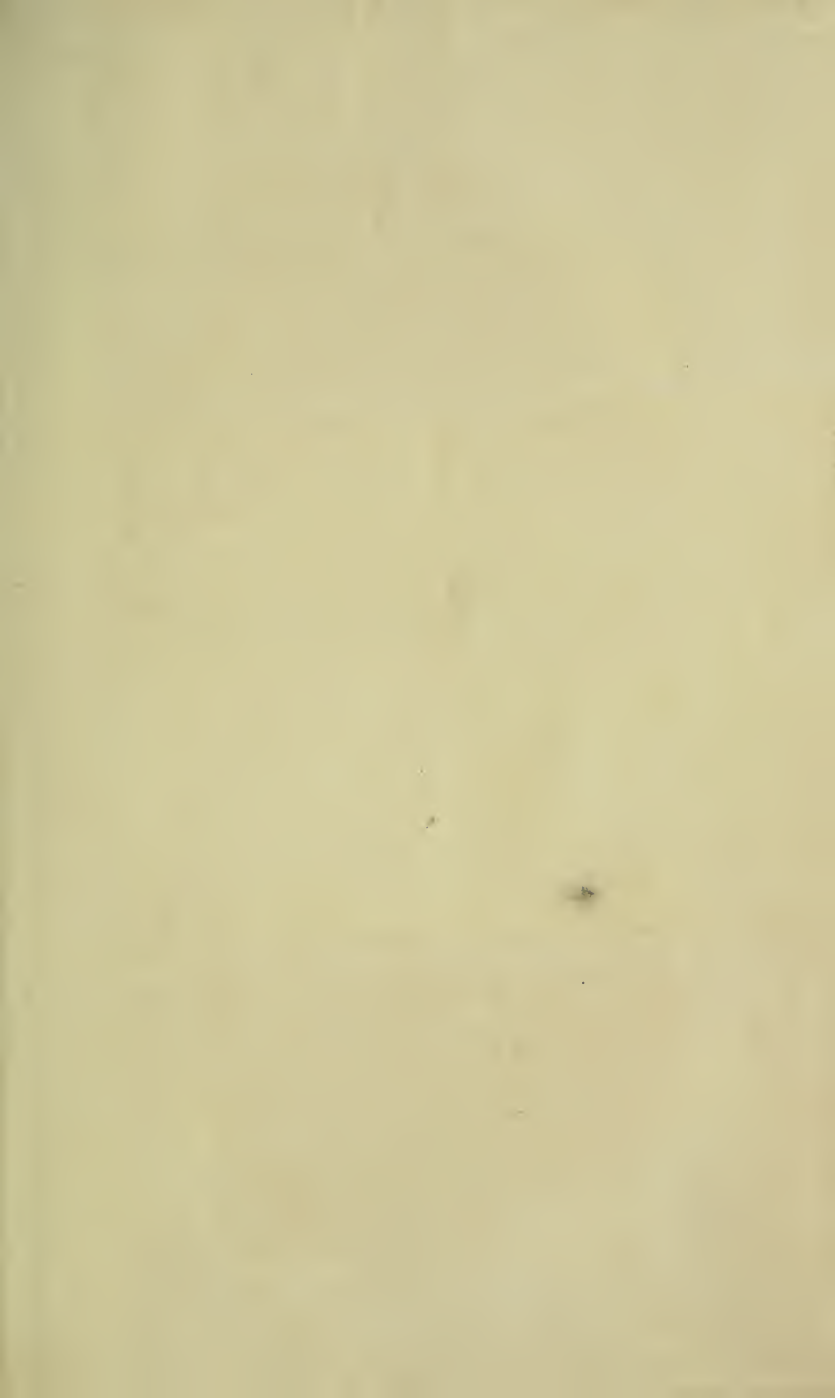
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QUITE ALONE.

BY

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY,

1864.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

38 Sept. 51
 THE concluding portion of these volumes—that is to say, from page 185, vol. iii., to the end—is not mine. “Quite Alone” has been finished during my absence from England by “another hand.” It is now my duty, in fairness to the public, and in justice to my publishers and myself, briefly and candidly to explain how it has come about that a work put forth under my name contains many pages not written by me.

38 Sept. 51
 I will at once drop the convenient, but very frequently disingenuous, plea of ill health. I was, it is true, when I left this country more than a year since, exceedingly unwell, and have had since then several attacks of influenza, a calenture or two, a low fever, and a touch of what seemed to be premonitory of the *vomito negro*; but, on the whole, I have been no more an invalid than could be expected in the case of a traveller rushing from one trying climate to another, and have, thank God, “kept my health” in a remarkable degree.

38 Sept. 51
 When I quitted home, in November, 1863, the novel of “Quite Alone” was about half finished.

It was entirely owing to the exceptional kindness of Mr. Charles Dickens that its publication was commenced in "All the Year Round : " it being, I believe, the rule with the proprietors of that periodical never to commence a serial story without the whole of the manuscript having come into their hands. But Mr. Dickens was good enough to hope, and I was sanguine enough to believe, that I could, within four or five months from the date of my departure, remit to him the concluding portion of the work. I am sure I did my best to bring about this consummation, so desirable to us both ; but I signally failed. Page by page, like so many drops of blood, about two hundred slips of manuscript oozed from me between spring and summer. They were written with a hard lead pencil on slips of carbonized paper placed upon tissue. I was obliged to "manifold" my manuscript, to guard against the uncertainties of the post. They were written at intervals of many days, and of thousands of miles. They were written in a hammock in Cuba, on board steamers, in railway cars, in hotel verandahs, in the midst of noise, confusion, smoke, cursing and swearing, battle, murder, and sudden death. In the month of August I broke down altogether, and the mails went out without any more of my tissue paper. I had lost the thread of my narrative. I had forgotten the very names of my *dramatis personæ*. I was in a new country—a new world, among strange scenes and strange

people, hurrying from place to place, badgered and baited and hated, always abused, often in peril of my life, and under all hazard compelled to send home every week from six to eight columns of matter to a London newspaper. To those who may accuse me of idleness or carelessness, I can only plead that I was the correspondent for twelve months in the United States and Mexico of the *Daily Telegraph*.

As regards "Quite Alone," I had undertaken a task which I was utterly unable to accomplish. It was the Thirteenth labour of Hercules: the last straw; and it broke my back. When I endeavoured subsequently to catch up the lost link, I found that it was too late. The conductors of "All the Year Round," reduced to desperation by the non-arrival of any more copy, and anxious to keep faith with their readers, confided my unfinished story to "another hand," by whom it was brought to a close, *sans bien que mal*. Till I returned to England I never knew who that other hand was. Under the circumstances, it is impossible for me to complain of the manner in which the selection was made; and I am sure that I am infinitely beholden to the gentleman who, at a very brief notice, addressed himself to such an unthankful task.

Returning, then, to commence fresh labours and incur fresh literary responsibilities, I found, to my dismay, that "Quite Alone" was advertised for re-

publication in a collected form. In common justice to Messrs. Chapman and Hall, in whose interest the book was originally projected, I could not deny my consent to its being so republished. Those gentlemen had treated me throughout with infinite liberality, courtesy, and forbearance; and I felt that I had no right to spoil their market and to keep their capital lying dead, when the delay to which they had been subjected was due simply to my own *laches*.

In conclusion, I beg respectfully to say that if the public will receive the first edition of "Quite Alone" in a tolerant and charitable spirit, and if the demand for it should warrant the issue of another edition, it will be my duty and pleasure to complete it according to the original plan mapped out, and to the very best of my ability. And that charity and tolerance I am confident enough to hope for from a public whose laborious servant I have been for sixteen years.

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

64, Guildford-street, Russell-square,
December, 1864.

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QUITE ALONE.



CHAPTER I.

SEULE AU MONDE.

THIS is Hyde Park, at the most brilliant moment in the afternoon, at the most brilliant period in the season. What a city of magnificence, of luxury, of pleasure, of pomp, and of pride, this London seems to be. Can there be any poor or miserable people—any dingy grubs among these gaudy butterflies? What are the famed Elysian fields of Paris, to Hyde Park at this high tide of splendour? What the cavalcade of the Bois de Boulogne, or the promenade of Longchamps, to the long stream of equipages noiselessly rolling along the bank of the Serpentine? Everybody in

London (worth naming) is being carried along on wheels, or bestrides pigskin girthed o'er hundred guinea horseflesh, or struts in bright boots, or trips in soft sandalled prunella, or white satin with high heels. There is Royal Blood in a mail phaeton. Royal Blood smokes a large cigar, and handles its ribbons scientifically. There is a Duke in the dumps, and behind him is the Right Reverend Father, in a silk apron and a shovel hat, who made that fierce verbal assault upon his Grace in the House of Lords last night. There is the crack advocate of the day, the successful defender of the young lady who was accused of poisoning her mamma with nux vomica in her negus ; and there is the young lady herself, encompassed with a nimbus of petticoat, lolling back in a miniature Brougham with a gentleman old enough to be her grandfather, in a high stock, and a wig dyed deep indigo. Is that Anonyma driving twin ponies in a low phaeton, a parasol attached to her whip, and a groom with folded arms behind her ? Bah ! there are so many Anonymas now-a-days. If it isn't the Nameless one herself, it is Synonyma. Do you see that stout gentleman with the coal-black beard and the tarnished fez cap ? That is the Syrian

ambassador. The liver-coloured man in the dingy white turban, the draggletailed blue burnous, the cotton stockings, and the alpaca umbrella, is the Maronite envoy. The nobleman who is driving that four-in-hand, and is got up to such a perfection of imitation of the manners and costume of a stage-coachman, has a rental of a hundred and thirty thousand a year. He passes his time mostly among ostlers, engine-drivers, and firemen. He swears, smokes a cutty pipe, and of his two intimate friends, one is a rough-rider and the other a rat-catcher. Mr. Benazi, the great Hebrew Financier, you *must* know : yonder cadaverous, dolorous-looking figure in shabby clothes, huddled up in a corner of the snuff-coloured chariot, drawn by the spare-ribbed horses that look as though they had never enough to eat. He is Baron Benazi in the Grand-Duchy of Sachs-Pfeifigen, where he lent the Grand-Duke money to get the crown jewels out of pawn. That loan was the making of Ben. There is nothing remarkable about him save his nose, which stands out, a hooked promontory, like the prow of a Roman galley, from among the shadows cast by the squabs of the snuff-coloured chariot. That nose is a power in the state. That nose

represents millions. When Baron Benazi's nose shows signs of flexibility, monarchs may breathe again, for loans can be negotiated. But when the Benazian proboscis looks stern and rigid, and its owner rubs it with an irritable finger, it is a sadly ominous sign of something being rotten in the state of Sachs-Pfeifgen, and of other empires and monarchies, which I will not stay to name.

What else? Everything. Whom else? Everybody. Dandies and swells, smoothed-cheeked and heavy-moustached, twiddling their heavy guard-chains, caressing their fawn-coloured *favoris*, clanking their spurred heels, screwing their eye-glasses into the creases of their optic muscles, haw-hawing vacuous common-places to one another, or leaning over the rails to stare at all, to gravely wag the head to some, to nod superciliously to others, to grin familiarly to a select few. Poor little snobs and government clerks aping the Grand Manner, and succeeding only in looking silly. Any number of quiet sensible folks surveying the humours of the scene with much amusement, and without envy. Foreigners who, after a five years' residence in London, may have discovered that Leicester-square, the Haymarket, and the lower part of

Regent-street, are not the only promenades in London, and so come swaggering and jabbering here, in their braid and their pomatum and their dirt, poisoning the air with the fumes of bad tobacco. An outer fringe of nursemaids—then some soldiers listlessly sucking the knobs of their canes, and looking very much as if they considered themselves as flies in amber, neither rich nor rare, and wondering how the deuce they got there. As useless as chimneys in summer, seemingly, are these poor strong men done up in scarlet blanket-ing, with three halfpence a day spending money, and nobody to kill, and severely punished by illogical magistrates if they take to jumping upon policemen, or breaking civilians' heads with the buckles of their belts, through their weariness. Aggravated assaults, says the magistrate, as he signs their mittimus, are not to be tolerated.

Anything else in Hyde Park at this high tide of the season? Much: only a score of pages would be required to describe the scene. All is here—the prologue, the drama, the epilogue; for here is Life. Life from the highest to the lowest rung of the ladder; not only in earliest youth and extreme old age, in comely virtue and ruddled vice, in wisdom

and folly, complacency and discontent; but—look yonder, far beyond the outer fringe—in utter want and misery. There, under the trees, the ragged woman opens her bundle, and distributes among her callous brood the foul scraps she has begged at area gates, or picked from gutters. There, on the sunny sward the shoeless tramp sprawls on his brawny back, grinning in impudent muscularity from the windows of his tatters in the very face of well-dressed Respectability passing shuddering by. And the whole “huge foolish whirligig were kings and beggars, angels and demons, and stars and street-sweepings chaotically whirled,” the Spirit of Earth surveys and plies his eternal task. Where is my Faustus? There—I cannot read the German. Here is Monsieur Henri Blaze’s French interpretation of the mystic utterances of the *Esprit de la Terre*: “Dans les flots de la vie, dans l’orage de l’action, je monte et descends, flotte ici et là : naissance, tombeau, mer éternelle, tissu changeant, vie ardente : c’est ainsi je travaille sur le bruyant métier du temps, et tisse le manteau vivant de la Divinité.” Sufficiently weak, limp, and wishy-washy, is this French Faustus of Monsieur Henri Blaze, I wot. It savours of absinthe, and an esta-

minet where they charge nothing for stationery. Turn I now to another, and immeasurably greater translator :

In Being's flood, in Action's storm
I walk and work, above beneath
Work and weave in endless motion:
Birth and Death,
An infinite ocean ;
A seizing and giving
The fire of living
'Tis thus at the roaring Loom of Time I ply
And weave for God the garment thou seest him by.

"Of twenty millions," asks the author of *Sartor Resartus*, "that have read and spouted this thunder-speech of the *Erd Geist*, are there yet twenty of us that have learned the meaning thereof?" But, Sage, is not the Spirit of Earth the Spirit of Nature? Is not Life the warp and Humanity the woof over which, spread on the "Roaring Loom of Time," the shuttle of production is always plying; and what is Nature: a field, a flower, a shell, a seaweed, a bird's feather, but the woven garment that we see GOD by?

When Humanity begins to fade out of Hyde Park, and goes home to dinner, or to brood by the ingle nook, dinnerless, or betakes itself to other holes and corners where it may languish, panting,

until bread or death come ; when only a few idlers are to be met in the Ring, or Rotten Row, or on the Knightsbridge road, you sometimes see a solitary horsewoman. She is **QUITE ALONE**. No passing dandy ventures to bow, much less to accost, or condescends to grin as she passes. A spare slight little woman enough, not in her first youth—not in her second yet ; but, just *entre chien et loup*, between the lights of beauty at blind man's holiday time, she might be Venus. She wears a very plain cloth habit, and a man's hat. I mean the chimney-pot. She has a veil often down. Great masses of brown hair are neatly screwed under her hat. She rides easily, quietly, undemonstratively. If her habit blow aside you may see a neat boot and a faultless ankle, wreathed in white drapery, but no sign of the cloth and chamois leather riding trouser affectation. She carries a light switch with an ivory handle, which she never uses. That tall lustrous black mare never came out of a livery stable you may be sure. She pats and pets, and makes much of her, and very placidly she paces beneath her light weight. The groom keeps his distance ; she is always alone : quite alone.

“Who the doose is that woman on the black

mare, one sees when everybody else has left the Row?" ask Fainéant number one of Fainéant number two at the Club.

"Sure I don't know. Seen her hundreds of times. Ask Tom Fibbs. He knows everybody."

Tom Fibbs is asked, and takes a "sensation header" at a guess.

"That's the Princess Ogurzi, who was knouted at the office of the Secret Police, by Count Orloff's private secretary and two sergeants of the In-nailoffsky guards, for sending soundings of the harbour of Helsingfors to Sir Charles Napier."

"Won't do, Fibbs. Try again. The Princess Ogurzi died at Spa the year before last, and the whole story about the knout turned out to be a hoax."

"Then I am sure I don't know," answers Tom Fibbs (who is never disconcerted when detected in a fiction); "I give her up in despair. I've been trying to find out who she is, for months. She is always alone; quite alone. A Brougham meets her at Apsley House, and the groom takes her mare away. I asked him one day who she was, and he called me Paul Pry, and threatened to knock me down. She dines, sometimes, quite

alone, at the Castlemaine Hotel in Bond-street. The waiters think, either that she's a duchess, or that she's mad. She's the only woman who ever dined alone in the coffee-room at the Castlemaine, but nobody dares to be rude to her. I've seen her at the Star and Garter at Richmond, at Greenwich, at Brighton, at Ventnor, in Paris, always quite alone. She's an enigma. She's a Sphinx."

"Is she demi-monde?" Thus, one Insolent.

"Nobody knows. Nobody ever presumes to speak to her, and she never was seen to speak to anybody save her groom and the waiters. She goes to the Opera; to the theatres; always quite alone. Upon my word, I think that woman would turn up at a prize fight: alone. I've seen her myself at Ascot."

As Tom Fibbs said this, a very tall angular well-dressed gentleman, with grizzled hair, and close upon fifty years of age, who had been sitting in an arm-chair close by, hastily flung down the Globe he was glancing over, darting a by no means complimentary look at Mr. Fibbs, and strode out of the room.

"I think Billy Long must know the Mysterious Stranger," languidly remarked Fainéant number

one, as the door closed. "He knows all sorts of monstrous queer people, and he didn't half seem to like what Fibbs said."

"Very likely. He's a cranky fellow."

"Very rich, isn't he?"

"Disgustingly so. What he wants in parliament with twenty thousand a year I can't make out. He never speaks, and passes most of his time in the smoking-room."

"Twenty thousand. That's a tremendous screw for a Catholic baronet."

"Yes: but he was as poor as Job till his father died. Painted pictures, or went on the stage, or turned billiard-marker, or did something low for a living, I'm told; but he's all right now."

As Thomas Fibbs, Esq., member of the Committee of the United Fogies Club, of the Turnpike Ticket Commutation Commission (salary 1500*l.* per annum, hours of business 3 to $\frac{1}{2}$ past 3 P.M., 3 times a week, 3 months in the year), was selecting his umbrella from the stand about twenty minutes subsequent to this conversation, preparatory to looking in at the Burke and Hare Club, to which he also belongs, and which is younger and more convivial than the Fogies, he found Sir William

Long, Bart., M.P., in the act of lighting one of those cigars which he was almost continually smoking.

“Might I trouble Mr. Fibbs,” said the baronet, in a slow and rather hesitating tone, “to refrain in promiscuous conversation from hazarding conjectures as to the identity of a lady with whom I am acquainted, and who, I can assure him, is a most respectable and exemplary person?”

“Certainly—oh, certainly, Sir William,” stammered Fibbs. “I meant no offence. I’m sure I didn’t.” And, so saying, he buttoned up his overcoat, and trotted down the steps of the Fogies considerably flurried. Sir William Long had been a member of the club for five years, and this was the first time he had ever spoken to Fibbs. That worthy, however, recovered himself by the time he reached the Burke and Hare, and hinted as mysteriously as mendaciously, that “Billy Long”—he called him Billy—had told him all about the Sphinx of Rotten Row.

“No offence,” murmured the tall baronet, as puffing his cigar he strode down Pall-Mall. “I dare say you didn’t mean any. Mischief-makers never do, and burn down the temple at Ephesus

with the best intentions in the world. Ah, Lily!" he continued, bitterly, "how long will you give all these idle tongues some grounds to tattle? How long will you persist in being quite alone?"

Still quite alone. Who was this female Robinson Crusoe? 'Tis a question which I shall endeavour in the course of the next few hundred pages to solve.

CHAPTER II.

BETWEEN HAMMERSMITH AND CHISWICK-LANE.

ONE bright afternoon, in the summer of 1836, the whole fashionable world of London had chosen to abandon Hyde Park, Pall-Mall, Regent-street, and its other habitual resorts, and to betake itself to the flower-show at Chiswick.

Probably about one per cent. of the ladies who thus patronised the exhibition of the Royal Horticultural Society cared one doit about the products collected in the conservatories and the tents. The Botanical Revival (which owes so much to Puseyism and the Tracts for the Times) was then but in its infancy; and, besides, a life passed in the contemplation of artificial flowers is not very favour-

able to the study of real flowers. People went to this great annual garden crush less to look at the roses in the pots than at those on the cheeks of other people ; and fuchsias on their branches were at a discount with them, as objects of attraction, compared with fuchsias that grew in white satin bonnets. Yes, ladies, white satin bonnets were worn in 1836 ; and for dresses even that sheeny material had not incurred the cruel proscription under which it seems to languish in 1863̄.

But if one in a hundred among the ladies were floriculturally inclined, what shall be said of the gentlemen ? Did one in a thousand trouble himself concerning roses, or fuchsias, or geraniums, or pelargoniums ? It did not much matter. People went to Chiswick because other people went to Chiswick. It was the thing, and a very nice, amusing, and fashionable thing, too.

So all the jobbed horses in London were spruced up, and currycombed, and polished ; and all the footmen underwent dry cascades through the medium of the flour-dredger ; and all the grandees in Granductoo stepped into their carriages, and were wafted rapidly to Chiswick. What pails of water had been dashed over plated axles in hay

and clover-smelling mews behind the mansions of the great! What spun-glass or floss silk wigs had been smoothed over the crania of ruddy double-chinned coachmen! What fashionable milliners had sat up all night to complete the radiant flower-show toilettes: the subordinates wearily wishing for morning to come and the dolorous task to be got through; the principals uttering devout aspirations that their bills might be paid at the end of the season. If poor Mademoiselle Ruche, of Mount-street, Grosvenor-square, did *not* obtain a settlement of her small account (904*l.* 3*s.* 6*d.*) from the Marchioness of Cœurdesart, when the season and the session were over, and *did* in consequence go bankrupt; if the flower-show was to unhappy Miss Pincothek, the “first hand,” the seed-time for the harvest which death reaped next spring; or if the night before Chiswick was to Jane Thumb, the apprentice girl, the last straw that broke the consumptive camel’s back—what were such little mischances in comparison with the immense benefit which of course accrues to the community at large from all fashionable gatherings? That the few must suffer for the benefit of the many, is an axiom admitted in the conduct of all

human affairs. According to the rules of fashionable polity, the many must suffer for the benefit of the few.

There could not have been a more magnificent day for the holding of a patrician festival. It had rained the preceding year, and snowed the year before that; but the show of 1836 was favoured by the elements in an almost unprecedented degree. Although the gracious Lady who now rules over this empire was then but a pretty young princess, it was really "Queen's weather" with which the visitors to Chiswick were for a brief afternoon endowed. One cannot have everything one's own way, of course, and although the sky was very blue, the sun very warm and bright, and the summer breeze very gentle, there was rebellion underfoot; and if the worm in the dust didn't turn when trodden upon, the dust itself did, even to rising up and eddying about, and covering the garments of fashion with pulverulent particles, and half choking every man, woman, and child who happened to be in the open between Hyde Park Corner and Kew Bridge.

The young ladies and gentlemen belonging to the various colleges, academies, seminaries, and

educational institutions in the high road from Hammersmith Broadway to Turnham-green—for of course there could be no such vulgar things as schools in a main thoroughfare, such low places being only to be found in by-lanes where children are cuffed and kicked, and don't learn calisthenics, and have fevers, and don't have French lessons—the fortunate little boys and girls attached to those gymnasia had a half-holiday on the flower-show afternoon, just as their tiny brethren and sisters at Clapham and Mitcham are exempted from lessons and permitted to be all eyes for the passing cavalcade on the Derby Day. Their shiny well-washed faces were visible over the copings of many brick walls; their eyes shone brighter than many brass plates whereon the academical degrees of their preceptors were engraved; their pleasant countenances were embowered in green foliage, so delightfully as to make the speculative wayfarer ponder on the possibility of there having been child-trees among the horticultural phenomena of the garden of Eden; their silver laughter, and the ringing clack of their chubby hands as they smote them in applause, made the same wayfarers (if they happened to be philanthropists) hope that those

argentine tones were never turned to wails of distress, nor that same sound of applause derived from cruel smacks administered by their pastors and masters. The domestic servants, likewise, along the line of road, if they had not had a half-holiday conceded to them voluntarily, took one without leave, and appeared at many up-stairs windows in much beribboned caps, and with lips ceaselessly mobile, now in admiration, now in disparagement of the male and female fashionables whom the carriages bore by. Nor were their mistresses, young, old, and middle-aged, employed in a very different manner at the drawing-room and parlour casements, from which points of espial they indulged in criticisms identical in spirit, if not in language, with those of the upper regions, and bearing mainly on how beautiful the gentlemen looked, and what frights the women were! Although, thus much must be stated in mitigation: That while they animadverted on the bad make of the toilettes, and the awkwardness or ugliness of the ladies, they did not withhold warm commendation from the quality of the garments themselves. Enthusiastic admiration for a *moire antique* is

quite compatible with intense dislike of the lady inside it. It is one thing to like a dress, but another to like the wearer.

The lower orders were determined also to have their part in this great afternoon. All over the world, when sunshine is once given, the principal part of a festival is secured. This is why the Italians are so lazy. As it is almost always sunny in Italy, the sun-worshippers (and it is astonishing how many Ghebirs there are among Christians) are nearly always doing nothing, or celebrating Saint Somebody's festa, which is next door to it. We see so little of the sun in England, that we are bound to make the most of him whenever he favours us with an appearance. The trading classes on the road to Chiswick enjoyed their holidays according to the promptings of their several imaginations. One abandoned his shop to the care of an apprentice, and took a stroll towards the Packhorse, where he met other tradesmen similarly minded, and was, perhaps, after many admiring comments on the carriages, the horses, the footmen, and the fashionables, induced to stroll back again, diverge from the main road, and take a boat at Hammersmith Suspension Bridge for a quiet

row up the river. Another (but he would be in a small way of business) gravely instructed the wife of his bosom to place a row of chairs outside his domicile, and there, enthroned with the partner of his joys and his olive-branches, would smoke his pipe and take his placid glass, exchanging the time of day and the news of the afternoon with neighbours similarly employed, and otherwise behaving in quite a patriarchal manner. A third, with an eye to business, wafered up sanguine placards relative to tea and coffee and hot water always ready; or displayed in front of his establishment, boards on tressels covered with fair white cloths, and creaking, if not groaning, beneath the weight of half-cut hams, fruit tarts, buns, and ginger beer. For do what Fashion will to keep itself exclusive, and have the cream of things, the common people will *not* be banished from the festivals altogether. They will peep over the palings or through the chinks thereof; they will peep round the carriages and criticise the occupants; and what can Fashion, itself, do more? Often, the common see the best of the fireworks; and the music of the brass bands, coming from a distance, falls more sweetly on their ears than of those who

are privileged to stand within the inner enclosure, and to be half deafened by the blasting and the braying. The purest pleasures in life are the cheapest ones. Once the writer knew a gentleman of a lively and convivial turn, but whose circle of acquaintances was limited, and who was, besides, so chronic an invalid as to be almost permanently confined to the house. At the back there was another house, almost always full of company, and where balls, supper-parties, and other merry meetings, were continually going on. It was the valetudinarian philosopher's delight to sit sipping his sassafras tea at his open window and cry "Hear, hear," with due attention to the proprieties of time and place, to the eloquent speeches, and sometimes to join in choruses when songs were sung in the convivial chambers whose lights glimmered in the distance. No pleasure could be cheaper; yet he enjoyed it amazingly. There was no trouble about dressing, about being introduced, about meeting people he didn't care for. He went away when he liked, without having to make, perhaps, a mendacious assurance to the hostess of having spent a delightful evening; and he rose next morning without a headache, or, worse still, the loss of his heart to that pretty girl in blue.

If some of the traders just glanced at did not make holiday in honour of the sun; if one crusty-looking cheesemonger denounced the whole proceedings as rubbish, and another secreted himself in his back parlour to brood over his speech at the next vestry, or Board of Guardians meeting; or if another, the worst of all, shut himself up to grumble over his books and hard times, and scold his wife and children, and curse because the people outside were enjoying themselves—what were these but the little flaws and specks that must needs be found in the brightest social diamond! If everybody were happy, what good would there be in expatiating on the blessings of happiness? It is certain, however, that the grumblers this sunny afternoon were in a grave minority. Troops of children who did not belong to seminaries or educational institutes, and perhaps came out of the by-lanes before alluded to, invaded the footway, screamed with delight at the processional pageantry, and endangered themselves, as usual, under the carriages without getting run over. It is certain that the offspring of Want very rarely enjoy a ride in Fortune's chariot, yet are they for ever hanging on behind, running close to the wheels, and diving beneath the horses' hoofs.

Many persons of grave mien and determined appearance — peripatetic, not stationary, traders — were turning the sunshine and its consequent holiday to commercial account. There did not seem any great likelihood, at the first blush, of the Court Guide, the Blue Book, the Peerage or the Baronetage, descending from their equipages to purchase lucifer-matches or knitted babies' caps, or to partake of jam tarts, gingerbread nuts, or apples three a penny; and the numbers of speculations entered into towards that end, on the footway, must have appeared to the superficial as rash in conception and pregnant with disaster. But the peripatetic merchants knew perfectly well what they were about. There was somebody to buy everything they had to sell, and they sold accordingly. Somebody was the great wandering fluctuating stream of poor people; and poor people are always buying something, and must perforce have ready money to pay for it. More remarkable was the fact that all the taverns and beer-shops on the line of road were full of guests; the men all smoking pipes and drinking beer; the vast majority of the women holding babies in one hand and Abernethy biscuits in the other. Why was this?

Why is this? Why will it be so, if augury can be hazarded, in ages to come? This flower-show was not a popular gathering. The tickets were ten shillings each. The people had nothing to do with it. They just took a good long stare—not of envy, be it understood, but of lazy and listless curiosity, at the fine folks in the carriages, and then trooped into the nearest public-house for beer, tobacco, baby-nursing and biscuit-munching. There is surely a dreary sameness about the amusements of the English people; and, for aught we know, the system adopted of rigorously excluding them from anything that is to be seen, and fencing them off by barriers and reserved seats, just as though they were unclean animals, from every trumpery section of infinite space where something humanly considered grand is going on, may have been carried a little too far. Gentility has robbed the poor playgoer of his best seats in the pit, and made them into stalls. The gallery even, once specially appropriated to the gods, has now its amphitheatre stalls. The railway formula has penetrated everywhere. All is first, second, and third class, from refreshment-rooms to funerals.

Neither pit-stalls nor railway formulæ were

thought much of, however, in the year '36, and the honest folk enjoying their outing, took their pipes and malt liquor, nursed their bantlings and ate their biscuits because there was nothing else for them to do, and without asking the reason why. The present age is always asking the reason why, and may be much the better for it;—which I hope it is.

It was about five o'clock in the evening when the gardens at Chiswick were most thronged, and when a Babel of silvery tongues echoed on malachite lawn and gravel walk, that a gentleman's cabriolet of the period—a “cab,” as it was very modestly named (at the risk of being confounded with the plebeian high-hung saffron-hued vehicles with a seat for the driver at one side), passed swiftly by Turnham-green, and so to the gardens of the Horticultural Society. It was a faultless cab; exquisitely appointed, shining in its every part like a pair of Wellingtons fresh home from the tip-top maker's. The tiger was a Lilliputian phenomenon, with apparently three tightly-fitting natural skins: one of leather, bifurcated for his nethers: another of pepper and salt cloth for his coat: a third of jetty-black surmounted with brown

streaks for his top-boots. Portions of his epidermis they must have been ; for although, if artificial, he might have got them on, it was beyond the range of human possibility that he could ever get them off. Stay, an additional article must be mentioned in regard to his buckskin gloves. With shining livery buttons, with a tight little belt round his tight little waist, and a hat bound with silver cord, this domestic was surely the tightest tiger that ever was seen.

He leaped down, like an elfin groom as he was, when the cab stopped, and in three bounds was at the head of the great brown champing horse. Then the apron was flung open, and a gentleman descended, and said, "Drive back to town !" Whereupon the nimble tiger skimmed, so to speak, in the airiest manner to the vacant place, gathered up the reins in his tiny buckskinned hand, gave the whip a gentle flourish about the plated harness of the brown horse, and departed at an agile trot.

The late occupant, and, it is to be presumed, owner, of this vehicle, having been duly brushed down by one of the red jackets who had come specially from Pall-Mall for the occasion, presented

his ticket and entered the gardens. He was a tremendous dandy, in an age of dandies. The Brummel type was not yet extinct. The heavy languid dragoon-like dandy, with his loose clothes, looser slouch, and pendent moustaches, had not yet made his appearance. The only thing loose about the dandy, then, were his morals. The owner of the cabriolet was the brisk, alert, self-satisfied dandy of the time. The tailor, the shirtmaker, the bootmaker, the staymaker, the hairdresser, could do no more for him than they had done. They had exhausted their faculties in adorning him. Another lappel to the coat, another curl to the coiffure, another whiff of perfume about him, and the dandy would have been spoiled. As it was, he was as perfect as a man could be with three under waistcoats, a very high shouldered higher collared coat with velvet collar and cuffs, lavender pantaloons very tightly strapped over his boots, a hat with a turned up brim, a voluminous shirt frill with diamond studs down the breast, white kid gloves, and a gold-headed cane with a long silk tassel.

Dress makes up so much of the dandiacal entity that the description of this ineffable person's countenance has been temporarily overlooked. It was

worth looking at. A dandy face, but not a monkey-fied, not a simpering one. His age seemed to be between thirty and forty; but it was evident that at no very remote period he had been an eminently handsome man. His teeth were beautiful. His hands and feet were in a concatenation accordingly. He had a charming red and white complexion. His hair was black and glossy, and admirably adjusted. So, too, with his mathematically cut whiskers and chin tuft. Moustaches he had none. When he smiled, he showed the beautiful teeth a good deal; when his glove was off, he made a liberal display of the emerald and diamond rings on his dainty white hand. There was no finding any fault with the man's outward appearance, for albeit expensively dressed, and with a great gold chain meandering over his cut velvet waistcoat, and a double diamond pin in his cravat, he looked from head to foot a gentleman. It should finally be mentioned that there were two trifling drawbacks to his good looks. Across his left cheek, almost from the corner of the mouth to the eye, there ran a very deep scar, which when he talked turned livid. His eyes, too, were very colourless and sunken, and there were brownish rings beneath

them. But for these the dandy would have been an Adonis.

He was evidently very well known. He stopped to speak to ladies belonging to the élite. He was asked whether he had been to the duchess's ball ; whether he was going to the marchioness's rout. His replies were affirmative. He was tapped on the arm with pretty parasols and scent bottles, and scolded prettily for not having executed some commission, accepted some invitation, joined some junketing recently afoot. Clearly our dandy was very popular among the sex. Nor did the men treat him with less favour.

There came up my Lord Carlton, a wild rake of the time, and deep player, with little Harry Jermyn, his admirer, crony, toady, on his arm.

"How do, Griffin?" was his lordship's salutation. "Monsous baw stopping here. Confounded military band blows roof of one's head off. Come away, Griffin, and have a hand at piquet at my rooms in town."

"I would with pleasure," Griffin answered, "but I've a little business to transact in this neighbourhood before I return."

"Business?" echoed his lordship. "Business at

a flower-show? Dooood queer place for business, Griffin. You haven't turned market gardener?"

"Il y a des fleurs animées," quoth little Mr. Jermyn. "All the Chiswick roses don't grow on bushes."

"None are growing elsewhere hereabouts for me," smiled the dandy, lifting his hat for the hundredth time to a passing party of ladies.

"Then what are you going to stop here for, when it's time to go back to town?" Lord Carlton pursued, elevating his eyebrows in pardonable amazement. "Going to look at a horse?"

"No."

"Going to dine at Richmond?"—his lordship said "Wichmond," but it would be both tedious and indecorous to give typographical expression to his defective linguals.

"No. I lunched very late, just before coming down; and if I dine at all, it will not be till night."

"Never mind, my boy, you'll get plenty of supper at Crocky's," Mr. Jermyn here cut in.

A slight cloud passed across the white forehead of the dandy, but he chased it away with an airy toss of the head.

"Of which club," he blandly retorted, "Mr. Jermyn is not, I fear, a member?"

"Got nothing but black balls," his lordship added, by way of confirmation, and with a loud chuckle. "Poor fellow, his proposer stayed away, and his seconder came from Scotland on purpose to pill him. There was one white ball, but that was from a fellow who was short-sighted, and popped his pill into the wrong side."

"Mr. Jermyn will have, I trust, better luck next time," remarked Griffin. "Had I not been in Paris——"

"At Frascati's?" interposed his noble friend.

"In Paris," he continued, taking no notice of the interruption, "Mr. Jermyn might have reckoned on my humble support. I should have been delighted to find him one of us."

"Yes, I dare say you would," acquiesced Lord Carlton. "Harry's a very good fellow, and has plenty of feathers ready to be plucked, before he is fit to be made into a compote de pigeons. You'd have given him two white balls, I'm sure you would, Griffin."

"Oh yes, I'm sure you would," repeated Mr. Jermyn. The assurance was double-barrelled—

susceptible of two meanings. Mr. Henry Jermyn hated the dandy for belonging to a club to which he had himself failed to procure admittance, although he well knew that the honorary co-membership might prove in the long run costly if not ruinous. Yet he would have jumped for joy, had the exquisite addressed as Griffin offered to propose him.

"Never mind, Harry," his good-natured lordship observed. "Safe to get in next time. Can't keep you out. Besides," he added, turning to the dandy, "the fellows made a mistake after all. They took Harry for big Jack Jermyn—you know big Jack—the racing man who was in the Eighth, and levanted after Newmarket the year before last. They thought it was all up with Jack, and didn't care about having a rook in the dovecot. By Jove! If they knew that Harry was to have all his grandmother's money—how old is she, Harry?—he'd have been elected unanimously, and received with a salute of twenty-one guns."

"Mr. Crockford must have shed tears when informed of the sad truth," remarked the dandy, with sardonic politeness. "However, fortune will make amends. I hope to meet Mr. Jermyn as a fellow-member at supper in St. James's-street as

soon after his grandmamma's decease as possible." And the dandy, lifting his hat for the hundred and tenth time that afternoon, strolled away.

"Monsous well-preserved man, Griffin Blunt," Lord Carlton said, looking with careless admiration after his retreating friend; "wears very well. Must be forty, if he's a day."

"He looks queer about the eyes," Mr. Jermyn ventured to observe, in mild disparagement.

"Late hours," explained his lordship, who generally went to bed about four in the morning and rose about three in the afternoon. "Griffin is a shocking night-crow."

"What do they call him Griffin for, and who is he?"

"How amazingly raw you are!" exclaimed his lordship, elevating his eyebrows in some surprise. "Don't you know that Frank Blunt goes by the name of Griffin, because he used to wear a scaly green-silk coat when he drove his curricule at the time of the Regency? Dooood queer time it must have been, too, and dooood queer fellows. Should have liked to belong to that set, only they drank so dooood hard."

"Has he any money? How does he get his living?"

"How should I know? P'r'aps he's his grandmother's heir, if he hasn't sold the reversion. You'd better ask him. He's apt to turn crusty sometimes. He got that scar on his cheek in '15, in a duel with a French dragoon officer in Paris. Griffin Blunt was in garrison at Versailles, and came up to dine in the Palais Royal, and the dragoon picked a quarrel with him about Waterloo—they were always picking quarrels, those French fellows, at that time—and Griffin knocked him down; and then they fought with sabres in the Bois de Vincennes, and Griffin had his pretty face laid open; but, by Jove! he killed the dragoon."

"And what does he do now?"

"What a lot of questions you ask! I'm not his godfathers and his godmothers. I believe he sold out after the peace, and went to India to grow indigo, or buy opium, or shake the pagoda-tree, or something of that sort. Well, he came back, and he's been on town these ten years; at least, I've known him ever since I came up from Oxford."

"Est-il mauvais sujet?" Mr. Jermyn asked.

"I believe he's about as bad as bad can be," coolly replied Lord Carlton. "He's worse than I am, and that's saying a good deal."

“And about his money?”

“Don’t know anything about it. He lives high, and must spend three thousand a year. Charming little house in Curzon-street. Goes in for deep play, and bets, and so forth; but I don’t know whether he’s worth twopence in the world or not.”

“Is he married?”

“Married! By Jove! one would think you wanted me to say my catechism. What do I know? Griffin Blunt never said anything about his being married, and there’s nobody in Mayfair who owns to the name of Mrs. Blunt. Come along.”

Mr. Blunt was a squire of dames. Group after group of ladies took him up, and did not drop him after brief parley, as I am told it is the elegant but rather embarrassing custom of the ladies of the great world to do. They were sorry to part with him, for it was agreed on all sides that Mr. Blunt was most amusing and agreeable. There were some prudent mammas who looked upon him as a dangerous man, and warned their daughters to beware of him; but then it was impossible to be very severe with a gentleman who went into the very best houses, who was undeniably accomplished,

faultlessly dressed, exquisitely well bred, and who could always procure a voucher for Almack's. Besides, Blunt had the rare art, or rather the rare tact, of paying court before the world to old and middle-aged ladies. He cast himself, morally, at their feet, and overwhelmed them with attentions, as though they were in all the bloom and freshness of youth. It was only when the world was not looking that Mr. Blunt occupied himself with young people; and it was on the staircase and in the conservatory that the sleek Griffin put forth his claws. "There are always young people growing up for one," he would say, in his airy manner; "but the dowagers who have places to give and money to leave, pass away. Let us cultivate the dowager. If a man wants to get on in life, he can't do better than study the History of the Middle Ages." To which Moyen Age culture Mr. Blunt owed much of his success.

Thus, floating through the sunny crowd, went on Griffin Blunt, admired, caressed, envied by struggling tuft-hunters, who would have given their ears (long ones, and good measure) for a nod or a half-civil word from half the people he was with. When a man comes to propounding com-

drums to duchesses, and promising to draw caricatures in the albums of ambassadresses, it is palpable that he must be well placed in society. "My humble proficiency in the fine arts," Blunt would occasionally say, "is worth fifty dinners, a hundred balls, and a week in each of the best country-houses, a year, to me. Of what use should I be in Dorset or Russell square? What do they know about the fine arts there, beyond the 'Beauties of England and Wales,' the portrait of the late Princess Charlotte, and the view of the Temple of Concord in Hyde Park? At her grace's it is quite another thing, and I go to her water-parties at Kew. My little musical accomplishments would be worth an heiress or an Indian widow to me if I were a marrying man. If I could play the violoncello, I should be invited to his Royal Highness's Wednesdays. I must learn the violoncello. Tell me where Dragonetti lives, and I will give him a guinea a lesson."

"You're an ambitious fellow, Griffin," would that shrewd novelist and newspaper writer, Whipstaff, to whom Blunt sometimes imparted these demi-confidences, remark. "You sail well before the wind, and in a short heat I'll back you to dis-

tance the best ; but you've no ballast, my boy, and you'll founder. Take my advice, and if you haven't laid by for a rainy day, borrow somebody else's umbrella, and don't give it back again."

"You are an excellent moralist," thus Mr. Blunt, with a pleasant sneer. "Are you, too, ready for the wrath of Jupiter Pluvius?"

"Never mind," retorted Whipstaff, who was notoriously not worth a penny, and in dire difficulties. "Let me alone, and I shall turn up trumps yet. Every bird feathers his nest in a different manner. The wisest one after all is, perhaps, he who never troubles himself with making a nest of his own, but pops into somebody else's. There are still a few sinecures left, that confounded Reform Bill"—Whipstaff was a staunch Conservative—"notwithstanding. The wind is tempered to the shorn lamb, and the old ravens of the Treasury Bench will provide for the barrister of seven years' standing." Such was the worldly wisdom of Mr. Whipstaff, who had eaten his terms some years before at his own expense, with the firm and fixed resolve of eating a great many more terms, one day or another, at the expense of the country.

Whipstaff was at the flower-show, and remarked

to several acquaintances that he never saw Griffin Blunt looking better. "How he manages it," he continued, "I can't imagine. I wish he'd give me his recipe for living at the rate of two or three thousand a year upon nothing."

"Shakes his elbow," suggested purple-faced Captain Hanger, who hated Blunt.

"Perhaps," acquiesced Whipstaff, with a sigh, "and is lucky. With me that species of paralysis has always proved the costliest of diseases."

And so the Whirligig went on in the Chiswick Gardens. Now Scandal's sirocco seized a spiteful anecdote, and twirled and twisted and sent it spinning from one end of the gardens to the other. Now it caught up a woman's reputation, and eddied it in wild hide-and-seek through the summer leaves. It was the merriest kind of word-waltzing imaginable; and never a sneer, an innuendo, a wicked bon mot, but found a partner. And in the midst of it all, the band of the Royal Horse Guards Blue brayed forth *Suoni la Tromba* with tremendous and sonorous emphasis. What did it all matter to them? It was their business to blow, and they blew as though they would have blown for ever. So the huntsman winds a find, a check, a mort.

So the drummer beats the charge or the chamade—the advance or the retreat. I myself think that the band of the Royal Horse Guards Blue, at the Chiswick Flower Show, had the best of it. When their labour was over they enjoyed gratuitous cold meats and beer, and the band-master shared between them a handsome donative.

CHAPTER III.

NURSE PIGOTT.

THE Chiswick festival came to an end, and the company departed. Griffin Blunt lingered to the last, and wound his way to the door of egress, through a silken labyrinth of polite conversations and bowing adieux. Ivanhoff's last aria, and Malibran's last cadence; Prince Esterhazy's last conversazione, and the Duke of Devonshire's last ball at Brighton; the odds for the St. Leger, the beauties of drawn tulle bonnets; taste and the musical glasses—without Shakspeare—had each their graceful mention, as Blunt fluttered in and about the parterres of beauty and fashion. The scene at the gate was like the crush-room at the

Opera, only with mellow sunlight turned on, instead of garish gas—like the “pin” at St. James’s without the trains and plumes. The company had begun to yawn. Even Fashion is not exempt from the laws of fatigue; and perhaps one reason why great people grow tired of one another, is that they see one another so frequently—the endurable world being so extremely small.

Mr. Blunt had divers offers of conveyance to town. He might have continued a Squire of Dames to the last, and sat behind the most expensively jobbed horses in the metropolis. But he courteously declined all such proposals. He had a little business to transact, he said, and he was everybody’s humble and devoted servant. He remained, however, chatting, bowing, smiling, until the crush grew thin, until the shamefaced people who had come down in glass-coaches and hackneys took heart of grace and bade the red jackets summon their hired vehicles, and until one or two attachés of foreign legations, and hardened Guardsmen, kindled their cigars before strolling away. In justice to them it must be admitted, that even these offenders peeped round to see there were no ladies near. Now-a-days, shame

and the smoker have been hopelessly divorced. So far from hesitating as to lighting a cigar in a lady's presence, the worshipper of nicotine well-nigh presumes to ask Beauty for a Vesuvian. *A qui la faute?* Is Beauty or Bœotia to blame?

The trees of Chiswick were bathed in crimson and burnished gold, and cast shadows of deepest purple, before Blant himself ventured to light his cigar. When he began to smoke, he smoked vigorously, and as he walked away with a firm hasty tread, the white wreaths of vapour circling behind him, his gait seemed very different from that of the mincing tripping exquisite of half an hour ago. Had you had Fortunatus's cap, or had you been in the receipt of fern seed, you might have availed yourself of the privilege of invisibility, trodden on his varnished heel—marked how nervously he turned and started, although he had but scrunched a pebble—and then, looking in his face, have discovered, not without amazement, that his face was as the face of an old man.

Terribly jaded, haggard, and careworn. A film seemed to have come over the eyes. No silver, but a rust rather, mingled with the jetty hair and whiskers. And the smile had fled away from the

mouth, and left only furrows of cruelty and hardness there.

He struck into a by-lane, green and solitary as though it had been fifty miles from London, and walking rapidly, soon came upon a mean little wayside tavern, all thatch and ivy and honeysuckle, and with the sign of the Goat swinging before it. He passed through the bar, where two market gardeners sprawled over their pipes and beer on a bench—one, awake and uproarious; the other, asleep and snoring; both as happy, doubtless, as the Great Mogul. He turned to a little side-window, and in the most unaffected manner in the world ordered a glass of brandy. He, order brandy! Nevertheless, he not only did order brandy, but drank it without flinching; and, what is still more singular, paid for it—a performance to which he was, to say the least, unaccustomed. However, this was to be for Mr. Blunt an evening unusually marked by the disbursement of ready money.

“There is a person here with a child,” he said, less asking a question than asserting something of which he entertained no doubt.

“In the parlour, sir,” the landlady replied, with

a low curtsy; for gentlemen so gallantly accoutred were by no means frequent customers at the Goat.

He looked inquiringly for the parlour's whereabouts. The landlady bustled from behind her counter, and ushered him into a little room at the extremity of the passage, and then returned to gossip with her daughter about the beautiful teeth and whiskers and gold chain of the distinguished stranger.

"And such a lovely little angel of a child as is a waitin' for him," the hostess pursued, "his da'ater, for sure."

"Is her mother with her?" asked Phœbe, the daughter.

"Her mother!" echoed the landlady in great disdain. "Do you think, child, such a grand gentleman would bring his wife here among the likes of us. No, no, it must be the nuss; for she's only got on a cotton print dress and an eight-and-twenty shilling shawl, and her bonnet 'd be dear at four-and-elevenpence, strings and all."

"What does he bring *her* here for, and what could such a grand gentleman want with four

penn'orth of brandy?" persisted Phœbe, who was of an inquiring disposition.

"There, go along, child, and wash up your glasses," cried the landlady in a pet: probably because she too was unable to answer these questions to her own satisfaction. "It ain't no business of ours. Maybe he likes brandy, though the nuss had a pint o' wine and a sweet biscuit, and paid for it like a lady. Go along, I say, and don't stand chattering there." Whereupon Mrs. Landlady, who was somewhat hot of temper, elbowed her daughter into a small cavern used as a lavatory for the drinking vessels of the establishment, and entered into communion with a piece of chalk and a slate: not, however, being able to dissociate perturbed cogitations as to her customers from the otherwise absorbing occupation of calculating what additions might be discreetly made to the score of the two market gardeners, while the one was snoring, and the other singing a song certainly without beginning, and seemingly without end.

Meanwhile the object of this conversation had entered the parlour and made his salutations to its occupants. These salutations were of a twofold nature.

“How do you do, Nurse Pigott?” he said, with an affable nod and a forced smile, to a fussy dumpy woman with a very red round face, and for whose attire the brief but graphic summary given by the landlady to her daughter will amply suffice. “All well with you at home, I hope?”

“Nicely, sir, which it also left my husband, thankin’ you kindly, and glory be,” responded the dumpy woman, rising and dropping a profound reverence. “But oh, sir, Miss Lily have been a takin’ on dreadful.”

“What’s the matter with her—the little puss?” exclaimed Blunt, sharply. And this was his second salutation.

The “little puss” was sitting on the dumpy woman’s knee. Indeed, she was a very little puss—a tiny fair girl of three years old. She had very long brown hair curling in thick profusion round her chubby face. She had very large wondering blue eyes; but these, on the present occasion, were red and swollen. Her whole face was suffused with the moisture of sorrow. Her little lips were twitching. It was evident that the “little puss” had been crying her eyes out.

“Be quiet, miss, and don’t be naughty, or I

shall tell Nurse Pigott to give you a whipping," said Blunt.

His words were harsh and unfeeling; but oddly enough his manner was not so. He spoke less in anger than in the languid tone of an Indian Begum telling her slave-girl that really, if she gave her any more trouble, she would be compelled to have her buried alive. It may be that he had enjoyed very very little experience of children, and erroneously imagined that whipping was the only specific course of treatment available in the case of tears. At any rate, the threat had not the desired effect, the child being evidently aware that Nurse Pigott was no more likely to execute it than to cut her head off with a carving-knife. So she began to cry louder than ever.

"Tut, tut, tut!" Mr. Blunt murmured, pacing the room in vexation. "Dear me, dear me, Nurse Pigott, this is very embarrassing, and not at all fair to me, you know. When I paid your last month's bill, and told you I was obliged to take Miss Lily away, I distinctly informed you there was to be no crying. My nerves can't stand it, they can't, indeed." But there was little good in reasoning with Nurse Pigott.

“Oh! sir,” she sobbed out, half essaying to comfort Lily, and half to dry her own eyes with the corner of her shawl, “I can’t help it, I can’t indeed, sir, when I thinks of that there blessed innocent which I took from the breast, and have never left, night nor day, for three years Jani-werry, likewise nursing her through measles and hoopin’-cough, and all her pretty ways, a pulling of us all to pieces, and hangin’ round us, and my ’usband is a-fond of her as if she was his own, which we have buried two and the twins being the one of them that’s left is but sickly, and will never make old bones, which the doctor told me only last Tuesday was a fortnight, it breaks my heart, it do, indeed, to part with the little darling. Oh, sir, let the child bide with us, and don’t take her away.”

Griffin Blunt was too well bred to bite his nails—besides, he had not taken off his gloves; but he bit his lips, and contracted his brows, and paced the room more nervously than ever. “You’re a stupid old woman,” he muttered, pettishly.

“I know I am,” acquiesced Nurse Pigott, with a fresh succession of sobs, “and so’s my ’usband, that is in bein’ fond of the little cherub, and glad would he be for us to keep it, though only a

journeyman plasterer, and times is hard as hard can be."

"She is trying it on for more money, the old hypocrite!" Mr. Blunt said, internally. "I told you," he continued aloud, turning to Nurse Pigott, "that it was absolutely necessary for me to remove the little girl. I am about to take her to a place where she will be well educated."

"She ain't old enough to be educated," moaned Nurse Pigott. "Besides, my 'usband reads beautiful, and there's a lovely school round the corner at twopence a week, and let alone teaching, there's nobody but me knows how much bread-and-butter she wants."

"Pray let me have no more of this painful discussion," the dandy, with calm dignity, interposed. "When I made an appointment with you to meet me here, you understood the purpose for which you were to bring the child. You have been paid for her maintenance, and I must tell you, that if you have any views of gaining more money by her, they will be disappointed."

"Money!" exclaimed Nurse Pigott, half choking, and by this time as much with indignation as with grief. "Money! I scorns it. It isn't money I

want, nor my 'usband neither. If the dear child had been put out to us by the parish, we'd ha' done our dooty by it. If its fathers and mothers were lords and ladies and hemperors, we'd ha' done the same. It isn't for the money, though little enough, goodness knows, and not paid regular, which you know, sir, not being disrespeckable to you. And if you'd leave the darling with us, and money was a little short, I'm sure we'd wait for better times, and never trouble you for one brass farthing, if you'd only let us 'ave our little little Lily." Nurse Pigott subsided after this into mere incoherence of grief.

Mr. Blunt winced when reminded that he had not been too punctual a paymaster. He could see, however, that the remark was totally devoid of malice. He could not help acknowledging that the child, whom he had seen, perhaps, six times during three years, had been reared with infinite love and tenderness by Nurse Pigott, all vulgar and dumpy as she was. And something like a feeling of shame made his mind blush at the remembrance that this love and tenderness had been bestowed upon Lily by strangers.

"There, there, Nurse Pigott," he said, as sooth-

ingly as he could, "I'm sure you've done your best with the little thing, and her papa and her mamma (who is too ill, poor thing, to come and see her) are very much obliged to you. Only, you know, the best of friends must part. I told you that, ever so long ago. Come, don't let us have any more fuss—you can't tell how it injures my nerves—and kiss the child and all that sort of thing, for I'm rather pressed for time."

Nurse Pigott had her nerves too, and for days she had been attempting to nerve herself to undergo with fortitude a separation, which Blunt, to do him justice, had warned her was inevitable. For you see that to part with a domestic pet round which the chords of your heart have twined themselves, is very very hard. And Nurse Pigott had known Lily long before she could speak or walk. She had sat by her night after night in those sicknesses when the life of a little child is as easily blown out as a rushlight. She had rejoiced in her growing strength and beauty. For what light and knowledge there was already in Lily's mind, Nurse Pigott, with rough homely kindly hands, had opened the door. She had taught the little morsel of Christianity to prattle some prayers, to

lisp some key-notes of reverence and fear, and to look up at the sky, and talk of what became of good and naughty people. Lily used to call her "mumma," and the male Pigott (plasterer by trade, honest and kind-hearted fellow by nature) she accosted as "dada." Yes; the divorce was hard, albeit the youngling was none of their own. They had no girls; but Lily had possessed as a foster-brother the surviving twin, a tranquil little boy, with wisdom far beyond his years, who passed the major part of his time in sprawling on the ground (probably out of doors), in earnest contemplation of the curious features of that external world which the doctor forbade his parents to entertain a hope of his long living to investigate. Lily's nurture under the auspices of Nurse Pigott had been the reverse of refined, but it had never lacked affectionate and sedulous care. The good woman absolutely doted on her charge, although five shillings a week was all the remuneration she received for tending her. Work was sometimes slack with the plasterer, and he, his wife and the twin (whose profoundly philosophical temperament led him to regard potato-peelings as an aliment equal in succulence to bread-and-butter, or even to

meat), had occasionally to go on short commons; but Lily was never bereft of a meal abundant in quantity and nourishing in quality. She had never known what it was to go without pudding. A slight meat eater she was, as be seemed her age; yet what morsels of flesh she required were never wanting, even if they had to be purchased from the proceeds accruing from the deposit in tribulation of the plasterer's great silver watch. The male Pigott's affection for her was prodigious. In her earliest youth he could with difficulty be deterred from offering her sups of beer from his evening pint; and when told that the fermented infusion of malt and hops was improper refreshment for a child, he, of his own motion, absolutely forewent a nightly moiety of his beer money in order to purchase apples and gingerbread for his foster-baby. The price of half a pint of porter was not a very sumptuous bounty; but a penny goes a very long way in a poor man's household.

Lily's stock of clothes had never been very extensive nor very abundant; but Nurse Pigott had kept the little wardrobe with admirable and scrupulous neatness. Only once during the three years and a half had she ever importuned Mr. Blunt

(with whom she was instructed to correspond through the medium of a London post-office, and the initials F. B.) for money. That was after a journey to Kensington undertaken by the nurse, when in the window of a certain haberdasher's in the High-street, she had seen a robe of mouse-coloured merino, so curiously embroidered with silken braid, that she had there and then determined to secure it for Lily either by the legitimate means of asking Mr. Blunt for the money, or by selling or pawning her own goods and chattels, or by bursting bodily into the shop and making off with the much-coveted robe. Fortunately, however, measures so desperate had not to be resorted to. Mr. Blunt happened to be in funds and in a good humour, when he received a pathetic and ill-spelt letter directed to F. B.; and the sum demanded, which was but two guineas, was forwarded. But chiefly had Mrs. Pigott found favour in the fine gentleman's eyes from the exquisite cleanliness and neatness in which she had always kept Lily. The philosophical twin objected on principle to soap, and his father deprecated his being subjected to much lavatory discipline, on the ground that he (the twin) would be washed away if he were washed often; but there was always

warm water for Lily and Windsor soap for Lily ; nay, on one occasion good Nurse Pigott had purchased a bar of Castile soap, the which, from its curiously marbled appearance, the child imagined to be sweetstuff, and essayed to suck. Winter and summer she never went without her bath, and although her poor little garments had frequently to be pieced and darned, she was always shining as the newest of pins.

A very few words will suffice to explain how Lily came into Nurse Pigott's custody. Three years and a half before the commencement of this history, the plasterer became cognisant of an advertisement in the day before yesterday's Morning Advertiser (it was before the days of penny journalism), which he was in the habit of borrowing from the hostelry where he purchased his modest allowance of beer. This advertisement set forth that a lady and gentleman were desirous of placing an infant at nurse with some respectable person in the immediate vicinity of London. The Pigotts then occupied a diminutive cottage at Brentford. Forthwith they answered the advertisement, in an epistle which the plasterer considered to be a chef-d'œuvre of caligraphy and composition, and which was, indeed, a marvel of

archaic orthography and abnormal pothooks and hangers. In due time an answer arrived, and an appointment was made to meet the advertiser in London. Thither went Nurse Pigott, arrayed in her Sunday best; and, at a specified hotel in Dover-street, Piccadilly, she was received—not by Mr. Blunt, but by Monsieur Sourniois, from Switzerland, his valet, who made all the necessary arrangements for the reception of an infant six months old, and paid a month in advance of the sum stipulated for. Being asked whether the child was christened (for Nurse Pigott was a staunch Church of England woman), he replied that it did not matter. Being pressed on this point, he said it was all right, and that the child's name was Lily Smith. And as Lily Smith she was received by Nurse Pigott. The good woman did not feel herself called upon to ask any more questions. Infants are put out to nurse every year, and by the thousand, in and about London, without references more searching than a money-payment in advance. Very often no name at all is asked for or furnished. I wonder whether such a system encourages immorality. I should like to hear, on this subject, those blessed Sisters of La Sainte Enfance, “the Holy Childhood” at Hong-Kong,

who buy babies from the Chinese mothers to save the little innocents from being cast into the sea, or thrown (as they are in the interior of China) to the pigs.

The little Lily Smith throve apace, and had not more than an average share of infantile ailments. Monsieur Sournois came at first once a month to see Baby, and greatly impressed Nurse Pigott with the amenity of his manners and the affability of his conversation. By-and-by he was succeeded by Mr. Blunt, who never kissed the child, or fondled it, or took much more notice of it, in a languid survey through the medium of his eye-glass, than if Lily had been a waxen doll in a toy-shop. Thus did the little girl remain until she was nearly four years of age; and it was a day of bitter sorrow for Nurse Pigott and the plasterer, when a curt letter arrived from Mr. Blunt—or F. B., as he continued to sign himself—directing the child to be made ready and brought to the present place of rendezvous. So Lily, poor little shorn lamb, after having the wind tempered to her, was suddenly to be given up to the grim gaunt wolf.

I retract—gaunt if you please, but not grim; for while I have been telling the story of Lily's babyhood, Mr. Blunt's countenance has been robed in

his most dulcet smile, and he has been exhausting his seductive arsenal to soothe and conciliate the sobbing child. He has done everything but kiss her. One loses the taste for innocent kisses as one loses the taste for bread-and-jam.

The nurse was consoled and the child quieted at last; and after an infinity of hugging, the plasterer's wife announced that she was ready to go, and that she was sorry for having kept the gentleman so long. Between the spasms of her parting embrace she told Lily that she should see her again very soon.

"And I may, mayn't I, sir?" she continued, turning with an appealing look to the dandy. "Oh say that I may, if it's only once a year. I shall break my 'art, I know I shall, if I don't see my darling again."

"Of course, of course!" replied Blunt, who would have promised anything to secure a good deliverance. "The child shall write to you"—poor little Lily, who didn't know great A from a bull's foot: "that is, I'll write, yes, yes. Now, my good Nurse Pigott, we really must be going, you know."

So two heavy hearts and one very callous heart

went out of the little tavern parlour and into the road: the landlady and her inquisitive daughter craning their necks after all the hearts. There was no luggage to carry. Lily's effects would not have filled an ordinary carpet-bag; but Blunt had graciously informed Mrs. Pigott that she might keep the child's clothes, as new clothes would be provided for her at the place whither she was bound. Where that place might be, the good woman did not venture to ask.

At the end of the lane—not that by which Mr. Blunt had approached, but its opposite extremity—a hackney-coach was waiting. It was now nearly dark. By F. B.'s direction Nurse Pigott lifted Lily into the vehicle, which had already, as she could obscurely discern, one occupant, and that a man. The child was by this time wholly tired, and half asleep. The dandy condescendingly gave Nurse Pigott a couple of fingers, dexterously hustled her on one side, and in another minute she found herself crying in the middle of the road, quite alone.

But not so lonely as poor little Lily, albeit she was in a carriage with two men, one of whom told her that he was her papa.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISS BUNNYCASTLES' ESTABLISHMENT.

EARLY to bed and early to rise was the time-honoured maxim in the establishment of the Miss Bunnycastles, Rhododendron House, Rhododendron private road, Stockwell. Time-honoured indeed, and with justice it might be called, for it had been acted upon for at least twenty years, during which lengthened period the Bunnycastle family had kept a ladies' school in Rhododendron-road, as aforesaid. Stay; I have fallen into a slight error. When Mrs. Bunnycastle first undertook, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, those scholastic duties at Stockwell which her daughters subsequently and efficiently per-

formed, Rhododendron private road existed only in the form of a narrow path between two market gardens, and went, I fear, by the painfully un-academic name of Cut-throat-lane. But when culture came to Clapham, and civilisation to Stockwell, the by-path became a "private road," neatly gravelled, and bordered by trim villas. The old market gardener's habitation indeed remained, but was rechristened Rhododendron House. Formerly it had been known as Bubb's Folly. Bubb was the last market gardener, and inherited the house : a rambling one-storied structure of red brick : from his grandfather. Long and careful attention to horticulture brought him riches, and in his old age it was bruited about that he had become somewhat mad, though not so mad as to require any restraint, or being in any way incapable of managing his own affairs ; for he was to the day of his death as avaricious an old screw, and as keen a hand at a bargain, as could be found between Bermondsey and Brixton. His madness did not go further than that harmless eccentricity to which physiologists may have observed that enriched tailors, hatters, and market gardeners, are frequently subject. In pursuance of this

craze, Bubb turned all his nephews and nieces out of doors, contracted a morganatic alliance with a bold-faced housekeeper with an abusive tongue and an uncontrollable taste for silk dresses and ardent spirits, and—he who had sat for so many years under the Reverend Mr. Bradbody of Stockwell, and had even been a deacon to that shining congregational light—plunged headlong into secularism, attended infidel lectures, and ceased to believe in anything. He took to drinking also. In a word, Mr. Bubb was in his latter days that by no means uncommon character, a “wicked old man;” a quarrelsome old curmudgeon, who swore hard, drank hard, and didn’t wash. As a climax to his strange proceedings, he added a tower, or belvedere, to his grandfather’s old brick house. At the summit of this edifice, which resembled externally a Chinese pagoda brick faced, and with a dash of the truncated factory chimney about it, he built a smoking-room, where he swore and drank and took tobacco, till his time came, and he died. The pagoda-chimney belvedere had caused the house to be called Bubb’s Folly; and long after Bubb’s decease, ancient people persisted in applying the old title to Rhododendron House.

If the belvedere, however, were Bubb's Folly, the surrounding ground, which he directed in his will to be carefully let out in building lots, might, with equal propriety, have been designated Bubb's Common Sense. The morganatic housekeeper, to the rage and despair of the nephews and nieces, came into all the property, and even the High Court of Chancery could not pick a hole in the crazy old market gardener's last will and testament. The enriched housekeeper removed to grander quarters at Clapham, and the old brick Folly passed through many vicissitudes, while houses in the most modern style of domestic architecture sprang up on either side. Bubb, however, had willed that his Folly was not to be demolished, and, being advertised, at last, as "eligible school premises," with "an observatory admirably suited for scientific purposes," it was taken about the year eighteen hundred and sixteen by Mrs. Bunycastle, and turned into an establishment for young ladies.

Mrs. Bunycastle's husband was a gentleman who had taught writing, arithmetic, and the use of the globes, in suburban seminaries, for many years. He also gave instruction in the Belles

Lettres: that is to say, he would recite, with the sonorous emphasis of the late John Kemble, any number of pages from the "Elegant Extracts" and "Enfield's Speaker." To this declamation young ladies of a literary turn (it was a blue-stock-ing age) listened with intense admiration. Mrs. Bunycastle (née Lappin) had been in her youth a nursery-governess in a great family, and was of a soft sentimental disposition. She was a great educational theorist, and had so filled her head with dogmas of tuition out of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Madame Leprince de Beaumont, and Mesdames Chapone, Trimmer, and Hannah More—to say nothing of Dr. Edgeworth, and the Reverends Messrs. Gisborne and Chirol, and Dr. Fordyce's "Discourse on the Character and Conduct of the Female Sex"—that her educational system ended in her permitting her pupils to do pretty well as they liked. She was much beloved by them, in consequence. Her favourite work, after "Emile," was "Adelaide and Theodore, or Letters upon Education:" that dreary simpering old farrago of well-meaning inanities, in which the baroness writes to Madame d'Ostalis to tell her how Seraphine has bitten her little brother,

but how she has succeeded in "producing perfection" in her daughter Adelaide, who is "fourteen years old, an excellent musician, drawing with amazing proficiency, speaking and singing Italian like a native, and absolutely cured of all little female deficiencies." Happy Adelaide, and thrice happy baroness !

The worthy Bunycastle died a year before Rhododendron House was taken. His widow was faithful to his memory, and brought up her three daughters, Adelaide (so christened after the baroness's paragon), Celia, and Barbara, in love and reverence of their inoffensive papa's portrait, with its shirt frill, and its hair powder (the latter beautifully painted), and with the silver standish "presented to him by the young ladies of Ostrolenko Lodge, Camberwell, in slight testimony of his unwearied exertions in teaching them plain and ornamental writing, arithmetic (on Mr. Walkin-game's principle), the use of the globes, and other polite accomplishments, for many years." In this history's year 1836 the three Miss Bunnycastles were all old maids. There is no use in disguising the matter ; it was palpable. With Adelaide and with Celia the case was hopeless. They were both

past thirty, and had made up their minds to celibacy. About Barbara, only, who was barely twenty-five, could any faint and feeble matrimonial hopes be entertained. When such hopes were hinted in her presence by the charitable-minded among her own sex—the married ladies, *bien entendu*—Barbara shrugged her pretty shoulders—she *was* pretty—and sometimes smiled, and sometimes sighed. Meanwhile she went on watching the pianoforte practice, and the small-tooth combing (after sundry soap and towel preliminaries) of the little ones on Saturday nights. That was her department in the economy of Rhododendron House. She did not murmur. She was perfectly resigned. Only, if any eligible young man had suddenly appeared before her, say from the Planet Mars, or from the bowels of the earth, and had said, “It is true that I am a returned convict, a professed forger and coiner, and a monster in human form—that I have a blighted heart and a seared conscience—that I murdered my great-aunt, and sold my country, and picked a gentleman’s pocket of a yellow bandanna at Camberwell Fair; but still my intentions are strictly honourable. I have a marriage

license in my right-hand trousers-pocket, and a ring and a pair of white kid gloves in my left. There is a glass-coach at the door, the pew-opener will officiate as bridesmaid, and the beadle will be my best man. Come, my beloved, and I will lead thee to the hymeneal altar," I am inclined to think that Barbara Bunycastle would incontinently have cast her arms about that eligible young man's neck, and cried out "Take me, interesting stranger!"

In 1836, Mrs. Bunycastle was a very old smiling lady, with glossy-white ringlets. Her countenance was wrinkled, but it was rosy still. She was still soft and sentimental, and much addicted to the perusal of novels: standing, as regards these characteristics, in strong contradistinction to her eldest daughter, Adelaide, who was an exceedingly practical spinster, and the inflexible disciplinarian of the establishment.

I have said that "early to bed and early to rise" was the golden rule abided by at Rhododendron House. The younger pupils retired to rest at half-past seven. Those of medium age, that is, under twelve, went to roost at eight. By nine, the elder girls reached their dormitories. At

ten, the governesses and parlour-boarders bade Mrs. Bunycastle good night. At half-past ten, the three daughters of that estimable and venerable person kissed, each, her parent on the forehead; and by eleven o'clock every light in Rhododendron House was extinguished. All the girls and their teachers were up by six o'clock in the morning; the three sisters only indulged in half an hour's extra somnolence; and, punctually at eight o'clock, Mrs. Bunycastle, in her unvarying cap with yellow satin bows, and her white ringlets arranged in faultless symmetry, made her appearance at the common breakfast-table.

All their meals, with one exception, pupils and preceptresses took together. Breakfast, dinner, and tea, were served in the great bow-windowed dining-room giving on to the lawn; but supper was a special and exclusive meal which none of the children partook of at all, which the parlour-boarders and teachers consumed in a kind of still-room adjoining the pantry, but which Mrs. Bunycastle and her daughters enjoyed in their own little parlour. The meal was served (tea having been got through at five) at nine P.M. The mother and daughters loved to linger over their

meal, and, although they ate and drank but little, it was often prolonged to close upon the time for retiring to rest. It was the only season throughout the weary monotonous day when they were alone, and at their ease. They were free from the constraint of keeping on their countenance that expression of simulated gravity, not to say severity, which all those whose vocation it is to educate youth, whether male or female, think it their bounden duty to assume while occupying the rostrum of pedagogic authority. This is why schoolmasters and schoolmistresses get prematurely worn, wrinkled, and shrunken.

Supper-time, then, was an hour of unmingled delectation for the Bunycastle family. Then, they were free from the heated and half-stifling atmosphere of the schoolrooms ; for ventilation, as an adjunct to education, had not been thought of in 1836. Then, they were quit of the brawling exasperating swarm of youngsters, the scarcely less tiresome elder girls, and the exacting parlour-boarders, who, because their parents paid fifty guineas per annum for their maintenance at Rhododendron House, deemed it a prime article in their creed to hold, in secret, if not openly, Mrs.

and the Miss Bunycastle as the dust beneath their feet. At supper-time, the schoolmistress and her daughters were relieved from the presence of these superb ones of the earth in short skirts and frilled trousers. At supper-time, they were rid, too, of the teachers: amiable and worthy young persons all of them, no doubt, but wearisome on daily and unremitting acquaintance. At supper-time, they could chat without let or hindrance. They could run over the occurrences of the day. They could dwell, now with satisfaction, now with discontent, upon how much their young charges paid, and how much they ate. They could concoct letters of thanks to complimentary parents, or of deprecation to remonstrant ones. They could revolve plans of scholastic aggrandisement, discuss points of discipline, compare methods of instruction, grumble at their lot in that luxuriousness of complaint which is well-nigh akin to content, and gossip about their neighbours. Thus, supper in the little back parlour at Rhododendron House, combined the gravity of a cabinet council with the hilarity of a symposium.

CHAPTER V.

THE BUNNYCASTLES IN COUNCIL.

THE back parlour at Rhododendron House, dedicated to the nocturnal meal spoken of in the preceding chapter, was a very moderately-sized apartment. Indeed, if an observer of its dimensions had hazarded an opinion that there wasn't room to swing a cat in it, the remark, although coarse (and, as such, naturally intolerable in an establishment so genteel as Rhododendron House), would not have fallen very far short of the truth. This is intended to be a candid history; so I will at once confess that the back parlour was—well, what shall I say?—poky. A pair of folding-doors took up very nearly one of its sides, and these gave ad-

mittance to the front parlour, or drawing-room, or state saloon, which was furnished in a style of classic but frigid splendour, and where parents, guardians, and other visitors, to whom the Bunnycastles desired to show ceremonial honour, were received. No pupil dared to enter that sacred apartment without permission. Many, indeed, never saw it from the day when they arrived at school, and were regaled with the sacrificial cake and wine (both of British manufacture), to the day when their friends came to fetch them away. Even the Bunnycastles were chary about intruding on their *Sala Regia*, save on festive or solemn occasions. The back parlour was essentially their keeping and sitting chamber—their bower and their home.

The late Mr. Bunnycastle's portrait hung on one side of the modest pier-glass on the mantel, and an effigy—a very vile one—in crayons, of Mrs. Bunnycastle, flanked it. Opposite, was a small cottage piano; and you will see, by-and-by, that *Rhododendron House* was famous for its specimens of modern improvements on the harpsichord and the spinet. The window-curtains were of a dull decorous moreen; the carpets of a faded

crimson. The table had a cloth in imitation needlework, like a school-girl's sampler of unwonted size taken out of its frame. The chairs were of well-worn green leather. In a recess were three handsome mahogany desks and three rosewood workboxes, respectively pertaining to the three sisters Bunnycastle. Mrs. B.'s great black leather writing-case, where she kept her school register, and her account-books, and her valuables, had an occasional table to itself; and when I have added to the pictorial embellishments of the room, an agreeable although somewhat faded engraving of Pharaoh's Daughter finding the Infant Moses in the Bulrushes, and when I have remarked that on each side of the window hung a cage containing a canary, both of which were unceasingly watched by a grey cat of sly and jesuitical mien, I may be absolved from further performance of my favourite but unpopular part of the broker's man.

It was the same summer evening—the evening of the day of the flower-show at Chiswick, and of Griffin Blunt's rendezvous with the plasterer's wife at the sign of the Goat. The hour was half-past nine, and the Bunnycastles were sitting down to supper. Pepper, the maid, a demure person far

gone into spinsterhood, attended upon them. The Miss Bunnycastles had a decided objection to "bits of girls," as they were accustomed to call all female domestics under five-and-twenty. Every servant at Rhododendron House was expected to be thirty years of age, or to wear caps and a countenance corresponding to that period in life. Pepper's christian name happened to be Marian; but she was rigidly addressed as "Pepper," and every servant in the house went by her surname. It averted the possibility of familiarity on the part of the young ladies.

The supper was not a very sumptuous repast. It never was. Frugality, as well as early rising and timeous retiring, formed the rule at Rhododendron House; and the Miss Bunnycastles were small eaters. There was the remnant of a leg of mutton, cold, grinning in a very ghastly manner after its ordeal on the operating table at the one o'clock dinner. It was brought up more for ornament than for use, and unless some friend dropped in—a very small and select circle of acquaintances were so permitted to pay visits at supper-time—it was rarely subjected to the renewed action of the knife. Miss Adelaide Bunnycastle supped on a

small basin of arrowroot. Miss Celia seldom partook of any refreshment more nourishing than a minute parallelogram of stale bread, and a diminutive cube of cheese, with, perhaps, a slip or two of pickled cabbage; and Miss Barbara habitually contented herself with a slice of bread-and-butter. Yet all of them would have submitted to the severest of sacrifices rather than go without that which they imaginatively styled their "supper." Only with Mrs. Bunycastle did the meal assume the aspect of substantiality, and not of an airy and fanciful myth. She really supped. A nice bit of rumpsteak, or a boiled collop, or an egg and a slice of ham, or a mutton-chop; something warm, and meaty, and comfortable, in fact, was always prepared for her.

The beverage in which, and in the strictest moderation, the Miss Bunnycastles indulged during their unpretending banquet, was the no more aristocratic one than table-ale of the very smallest brewing. There could scarcely have been malt enough, in a whole cask of it, to have given a headache to the rat that ate the malt that lay in the House that Jack built. The ladies took two or three sips of the mawkish infusion of gyle and

hops, which had been more frightened than fermented by the yeast, and the ceremonial supper beer was over. But Mrs. Bunycastle was nightly provided a pint of the very best bottled stout. Nor—my protest of candour being duly allowed—shall I be taking an unwarrantable liberty, I infer, in hinting that after supper the good old lady was accustomed to reflect herself with a tumbler three parts full of a curious and generously smelling mixture, of which the component parts appeared to be hot water, lemon-peel, sugar, and juniper.

On this particular flower-show evening, the Bunycastle meal was of an extraordinary festive character, and the conversation of an unusually animated nature. Not that there was anything more to eat than usual, but there was a guest. The Midsummer holidays were just over, nearly all the pupils had returned, and some new pupils (all of them to learn extras) had arrived. Hence one reason for jubilation. Then, the quarterly bills had been paid by the majority of the parents and guardians, and with not more grumbling or reductions than usual. Another cause for joyfulness. Finally, Mr. Drax, the apothecary, had looked in to supper, and the Bunycastles were all very glad to see him.

Mr. Drax was the very discreetest of apothecaries to be found in College-street, Clapham, in the county of Surrey, or anywhere else you like to name. The first evidence of his discretion was in his keeping, by word and deed, his age a profound secret. He was the oldest looking young man, or the youngest looking old man in the medical profession, or, for the matter of that, out of it. You might have fancied Drax to be just over sixteen, or just on the verge of sixty. I am not exaggerating. How are you to judge of a man's age, when upon his face not a vestige of hirsute adornment is to be seen—when his cheeks are as round and as smooth as apples (apples in wax, before the colouring matter is applied: for Mr. Drax was pale)—when he wears spectacles, and a wig, and a white tie? He had lost all his hair, he said, through a fever in his early youth, and was thus compelled to adopt an artificial coiffure. When occurred the period of that early youth? Two years ago? Or half a century ago? I must answer, with Montaigne, “*que sçais-je?*” and the inquisitive ladies of Clapham, although their acquaintance with the works of the quaint old essayist may have been but slender, were constrained to give a similar reply to the oft-posed

question. There were no actual wrinkles on the Draxian countenance, and the slight puckerings under his eyes and about his mouth might have been the result of arduous study of his art; for, although I have hastily dubbed him apothecary, Parfitt Drax had passed both Hall and College, and was a general practitioner. He wore spectacles, he said, because he was short-sighted; but nobody knew whether his imperfect vision was in-born, or had grown upon him with years. He was too discreet to tell you. If he were, indeed, a profound dissembler and young, his spectacles, his wig, and his white tie, relieved him from that appearance of juvenility which, in discreet boarding-schools, at Clapham and elsewhere, would have been a reproach and a stumbling-block to him. If he were old, his make-up was perfect, and he, or his wig-maker, or his tailor, had triumphed over Time, who ordinarily triumphs over all. The accomplished Madame Rachel, and her more accomplished daughter, with all their Arabian, Indo-Syriac, and Mesopotamian enamels and varnishes, could not have made Drax look more "beautiful for ever" than he looked of himself under the influence of imperturbable discretion, scrupulous

cleanliness, a neckerchief of white cambric, a pair of glasses, and a false head of hair. This head, this wig, was in itself an achievement. It was discreet, like its possessor. It showed no tell-tale parting. It was rigid with no unnaturally crisp curls. It was a waving, flowing, reasonably tumbled, human-looking scalp covering, of a discreet mouse colour, that might have begun to turn grey the next moment, or have preserved its natural hue until Drax was gathered to his fathers. It was a wig for any age, or for no age at all.

Drax, I say, wore a white tie; a strictly medical neckband, a consulting neckcloth, a family cravat—symmetrical without being formal—dégagé without being careless—tied in a little square bow. Drax wore very large and stiff wristbands, in hue and consistence belonging to the glacial period. They added to his discreet appearance. His right middle finger was adorned with a mourning ring containing a lady's hair, and an indecipherable monogram. The hair was of an ambiguous shade. It might have been that of his deceased wife, or of his sister, or of his sweetheart, or of his grandmother. It formed an additional piece of artillery in his discretionary battery.

Mr. Drax was a frequent visitor at the school, not only in his professional capacity, but as a friend of the family. He was allowed to come as often as he liked,* and to supper uninvited. In fact, he "dropped in." But on this particular evening his presence at the usual repast was not due to the immediate exercise of his own personal volition. The Bunnycastles had agreed, early in the afternoon, that Mr. Drax should be invited to supper, and in pursuance of the resolution unanimously arrived at in solemn family council, Miss Barbara Bunnycastle had, in her own exquisite (though somewhat attenuated) Italian hand, written to him, "Dear Mr. Drax, *pray* come to supper, as *soon* after nine as ever you *possibly* can. We want so *very* much to *see* you, and *consult* with you on a most *particular* and *important* matter." The original underscorings are Miss Barbara Bunnycastle's, and not mine.

This missive, signed with the initials B. B., and "your *ever* faithfully," and sealed with Barbara's own signet, bearing the charming enough little motto of "Dinna forget," was duly despatched at tea-time by the page and knife-boy (the only male creature, with the exception of the gardener, who came once a week for four hours, forming part of

the Rhododendronian retinue) to Mr. Drax's surgery or shop in College-street; and punctually at half-past nine, the discreet apothecary made his appearance in the little back parlour. He had as small an appetite—or, in his discretion, chose to be as abstemious—as the Bunnycastles themselves; and so, after he had consumed a very thin slice of the grinning mutton, and sipped a very small quantity of the table-ale, Miss Adelaide Bunycastle mixed him, with her own fair hands (never mind if they were slightly bony), a tumbler full of the warm, colourless, but comforting mixture which her mamma was in the habit of imbibing after supper. Then the conversation, which had hitherto been fitful and desultory, became concentrated and engrossing.

“Did you ever hear of such a strange romantic affair?” asked Miss Adelaide.

“Only fancy,” Miss Celia continued, “no name given—at least, no real one—no address, no references, but an offer of fifty guineas a year, payable in advance, for a little girl not yet four years of age.”

“And such a beautiful spoken gentleman is the dark one,” remarked Barbara.

“And so beautifully spoken is the one with the bald head,” interposed Adelaide.

“Rubbish, girls,” quoth good Mrs. Bunycastle. “The bald-headed one isn’t a gentleman at all. He’s the dark one’s man-servant.”

“He has lovely eyes,” pleaded Barbara, “and charming teeth, and an angel smile.”

“He wears a diamond ring as big as a four-penny-piece,” said the practical Adelaide.

“I tell you he’s nothing but the other one’s valet. He as much as owned it to me, the last time he was here. But, master or man, it doesn’t much matter. Do tell us now, my dear doctor, whether we ought to take this little girl or not?”

All Mr. Drax’s discretion was required to enable him to give this interrogation a fitting reply. He stroked his chin with his hands, and crossed the foot of one leg over the knee of the other, his favourite attitude when in profound meditation. Then he softly swayed his discreet head upward and downward, as though he were weighing the pros and cons of the momentous question. The Bunycastlees regarded him with anxious interest. They had unlimited confidence in his discretion. At last the wise man spake.

“Your usual sums, my dear Mrs. Bunnycastle, are——”

“We say forty, and take thirty, or whatever we can get,” the lady superior responded, with a sigh. “Miss Furblo, it is true, pays fifty; but then she’s a parlour-boarder, and her father a purse-proud tradesman, with more money than wit.”

“Parents are growing stingier and stingier every day,” added Adelaide. “They think washing costs nothing, and they won’t even pay for a seat at church, or for stationery. That’s why we’ve adopted the *vivâ voce* system of instruction, and so saved half the copybooks.”

“They have the impudence to come and tell us that there are schools advertised, with unlimited diet, twenty-seven acres of ground, a carriage kept, lectures by university professors, weekly examinations by a clergyman, a drill-sergeant to teach calisthenics, milk from the cow, and all the accomplishments, including the harmonium and the Indian sceptre, for sixteen pounds a year. And no vacations, and the quarter to commence from the day of entrance!”

“I wonder what they feed the children upon?”

quoth Miss Barbara, disdainfully: "snips and snails, and puppy-dogs' tails, I should imagine."

"I thank Heaven *we* have never advertised," remarked, with proper pride, Mrs. Bunycastle. "*That* degradation has at least been spared the principals of Rhododendron House."

"Which always will continue to be exempt from such a humiliation," Mr. Drax put in, with a discreet bow. "Advertising has been overdone, even in the case of patent medicines."

The discreet Drax had committed one indiscretion in the course of his professional career. He had dreamed of a Pill which should eclipse the renown of all other pills, which should be vended by millions of boxes at one shilling and a penny-half-penny each (government stamp included), and which should realise a rapid and splendid future for himself. Drax's Antiseptic, Antizymotic, Antivascular Herbal Pills were launched, but did not attain success. Either they were not advertised enough, or they were puffed through wrong channels. The pills were a sore point with Drax; and his cellar was full of them. I hope the constitution of the rats benefited by their consumption, and that the old women supplied with the pills at

Mr. Drax's gratuitous consultations were likewise the better for them.

"Well, doctor, what do you say?" Miss Adelaide continued.

"Your terms are forty, and you take thirty, making even a further reduction when vacancies are numerous, and an increase in numbers is desirable. You had rather a bad time last quarter but one, when, scarlet fever having broken out, of thirty-eight pupils who were sent home to escape infection, only twenty-nine returned to resume their studies."

"And then, you know, Mr. Legg, the coal-merchant, who had four daughters here with the smallest heads and the largest appetites it is possible to conceive, had the wickedness and dishonesty to go bankrupt, and we never got a penny for two quarters' schooling of the whole four."

"Rent and taxes are heavy; risks are numerous; parents are, as you remark with pardonable severity, stingy; provisions are dear"—thus went on, discreetly pondering aloud, Mr. Drax—"and the fifty guineas are to be paid by half-yearly payments, in advance. Well, dear ladies, I think, if I were you, I should take the little girl."

“So young a child can’t eat much,” mused Miss Adelaide.

“She won’t want any accomplishments yet awhile, and when she does we must ask higher terms.”

“And her papa is evidently a gentleman,” Miss Barbara added.

“To say nothing of the man-servant with the diamond ring,” interposed Adelaide, somewhat maliciously.

“With one so young,” wound up Mrs. Bunycastle, with soft didacticism, “on a mind so tender and so plastic, who shall say what durable and valuable impressions may not be made? How many children are treated with harshness and want of consideration; how many have been set down as dunces and idlers, because their natures have not been understood; because their capacities have not been discriminatingly ascertained; because their susceptibilities have not been worked upon; because the responsive chords in their characters have not been touched by the judicious fingers of kindness and sympathy——”

“There, ma, that will do,” Miss Adelaide broke in, with a shake of sadness in her voice; “we’re

talking business, and don't want extracts from the prospectus at supper-time. The principal stumbling-block to me, dear doctor, is the absence of references. We are, you know, so very exclusive."

Exclusiveness at Rhododendron House meant this—and it has pretty nearly the same significance at five hundred boarding-schools—the Bunnycastles had a decided objection to taking any pupils unless they were perfectly certain of punctuality in the receipt of quarterly payments from their relatives or friends.

"Admitting that the want of satisfactory references is a serious impediment," remarked Mr. Drax, with his discreetest smile, "is it an insuperable one?"

"It may have been a love-match," suggested Adelaide.

"Or a scion of nobility," added Celia.

"Or one against whom great machinations have been formed," said Barbara.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunycastle, with an energy unusual to one of her soft and sentimental nature. "When you've kept a school as long as I have, girls, you'll know that there are, as the doctor says, hundreds of reasons

for putting a little bit of a child away, and leaving her under proper care till she's grown up. I think we're all agreed? The little one is to be taken?"

"Certainly," chorused the three maidens.

"You could not have arrived at a more sagacious decision," acquiesced Mr. Drax.

"But the most embarrassing thing of all is," Miss Adelaide resumed, "that she is to be brought here this very night. We expect her papa every minute. The gentleman with the diamond ring—the man-servant, I mean—said they might be as late as half-past ten. Only fancy a visit, at so late an hour, and from a stranger too, at Rhododendron House! Such a thing has never happened to us since we first came here. And it was principally for that reason, doctor, that we asked you to come. We wished, in case you advised us to take this little thing, to have you here, as a kind of witness, as it were, when her papa brought her."

"Perhaps her papa will object," remarked Barbara.

"To what? To something he can't see any more than the man in the moon can?" retorted her sister, snappishly. "Nothing would be likelier than his objection to a stranger being present if his

object is to secure secrecy ; but, at the same time, nothing is easier than to avoid the slightest unpleasantness."

"Of course, of course," said the discreet apothecary. "I apprehend your meaning in a moment, my dear young lady. You wish me to be a witness, but an invisible one. You must receive the visitors in the front drawing-room. If you will kindly have the lamp lighted there, and leave me here in darkness" (and, he might have added, "in discretion"), "with one of the folding-doors the slightest degree in the world on the jar, I shall be an auditor to all that passes, and you may depend on my adroitness to see as well as hear."

Miss Adelaide Bunycastle clapped her hands in grave applause at the apothecary's suggestion. Celia regarded him with eyes of favour. Barbara smiled upon him. Old Mrs. Bunycastle was just on the point of asking him if he would take just one little drop more of spirits-and-water (although I am certain that Drax, in his discretion, would have refused), when the gate bell was rung, and, a moment afterwards, the sound of carriage-wheels was heard crunching the gravel-walk before Rhododendron House. The ladies hurried into the drawing-room.

A solemn lamp with a green shade round it was hastily illumined ; and presently Pepper announced that two gentlemen, with a little child, requested an interview with Mrs. and the Miss Bunny-castles.

CHAPTER VI.

LILY SITS UP LATE.

FRANCIS BLUNT, ESQ., sometimes called Frank, but familiarly known as Griffin, entered the scholastic presence with the assured step of one who felt himself among those ready to do him homage. He was still exquisitely polite—indeed, courting was second nature to him; but his politeness was the condescension of a sovereign among his subjects—of the Marquis de Carabas among his vassals.

Mr. Blunt had thrown over his attire of the afternoon a long ample cloak of circular cut, deeply faced with velvet, and made of the finest broadcloth. It was called a “Spanish” cloak; and in Spanish I am afraid the eminent Mr. Nugee, the

tailor who had made it, was paid. Blunt had long since passed into that state of indebtedness when a man gets credit solely on the strength of his already owing so much.

Close upon his heels, and carrying a slight childish form wrapped up in a cloak, was Mr. Blunt's friend. Yes; he was his friend—his guide and philosopher too, although to the world the relation in which he stood towards the man of fashion was not more exalted than that of a valet de chambre. Mr. Blunt's friend was hero and valet in one, and looked each character equally well.

In his way he was as exquisitely dressed as his master. It is difficult to make anything remarkable out of a full suit of glossy black. You must needs look, in general, either like a waiter, or a doctor, or a schoolmaster, or an undertaker. The friend and valet of Francis Blunt, Esq., did not approach any one of the above-mentioned types of humanity. Mr. Nugee made the coats of the man as well as of the master. The valet's coat was perfection. It wasn't a body-coat, and it wasn't a swallow-tail—nay, nor a frock, nor a surtout, nor a spenser, nor a shooting-jacket. It was a coat with which no

one could quarrel. It had the slightest clerical appearance, just tinged with a shade of the sporting cut. There is little need to say anything of the supplementary garments worn by Mr. Blunt's friend. That incomparable coat disarmed all ulterior criticism, and would have compensated for any short-comings in the remainder of the attire. Such short-comings, however, were non-existent. Everything came up to a high standard of excellence. A delicate appreciation of art was shown in the thin brown gaiter with pearl buttons, that showed itself between the termination of the pantaloons and the foot of the varnished boot. A refined spirit of propriety was manifest in the narrow shirt-collar, and the quietly-folded scarf of black ribbed silk, fastened with a subdued cameo representing the profile of a Roman emperor. Even that diamond ring to which Miss Bunycastle had called attention, large and evidently valuable as it was, had nothing about it on which the imputation of obtrusiveness or vainglory could be fixed. It was worn on the little finger of the left hand, and rarely brought into play.

It is time to say a few words about the individual for whom a skilful tailor and his own

delicacy of taste had done so much. Nature had been partially kind, but, with her usual caprice, here and there hostile, to the individual. He was of the middle size, and clean limbed, but all the powers of the coat were needed—and they nearly but not entirely succeeded—in disguising the fact that he was so round-shouldered as to be almost humpbacked. Without the coat, he would have been Quasimodo; with the coat, he was only a gentleman who, unfortunately, stooped a good deal. His head was large, but the collar of that invaluable coat was so cut as to make his neck sit well on his torso. His hair was of the deepest raven black—blue in the reflexions indeed—and, had it had its own way, would have grown in wildly tufted luxuriance. But from nape to temples his locks had been shorn to inexorable shortness; yet, close as the scissors had gone, you could tell at a glance that a forest had been there.

In the whole attitude of the man there was repose, concealed strength, abnegation of outward show. Had he given his eyes and lips full play, the expression of his countenance would have been terrible. But, with rare self-denial, he kept his eyelids habitually drawn down, and veiled his

great, flashing, devouring orbs with the yellow nimbus round each pupil. In the same spirit of abstention from show, his lips, naturally full and pulpy, were under inflexible management, and were kept firmly set together. Not half the world knew what large, regular, white teeth he had. He sometimes smiled, but he never bit, in public. There was one concealment he could not, or had not, cared to make. The very large, bushy black eyebrows were untampered with, and notwithstanding the laboured amenity of his physiognomy, gave him a somewhat forbidding look. Add to this that his complexion was dark, but so far removed from sanguineous hues as to be well-nigh sallow, and that on each cheek he wore a short closely-cropped triangular whisker strongly resembling a mutton-cutlet, and you have him complete.

This individual was Monsieur Constant, valet de chambre and confidential factotum to Francis Blunt, Esq., and speaking English fluently and idiomatically. He knew all that his master did; and there were a great many things within his, the servant's ken, of which the master had not the slightest idea. Monsieur Constant said that he was five-and-thirty years of age, bien sonn  s, which

means that he might have been between five-and-thirty and forty; and there was no reason for disbelieving his statement. Monsieur Constant came from Switzerland—from one of the cantons bordering upon Italy, I should opine, to judge from his swarthy complexion. I believe his christian name was Jean Baptiste. Of his foreign antecedents he was reticent. His English antecedents could be known to all who were at the pains to inquire. They were enrolled in a long catalogue of distinguished service with the British aristocracy. His character, or rather his characters, were stainless. He had been the Marchioness of Cœurdesart's courier. He had valeted the Duke of Pamposter, and attended on his son and heir, the young Marquis of Truffleton, at Oxford, and throughout the grand tour. He had been for a short time groom of the chambers to Lord Buffborough, when that nobleman was ambassador at Paris. Griffin Blunt had won him from the diplomatic service, and although he lost promotion, if not caste, by the change, the valet clung with strange tenacity to his new master, in whose service he had now been three years. Master and man alike suited each other. Each, perchance, had his own game to

play, and played it with tranquil skill. Mr. Blunt declared that his man Constant was unrivalled. "None of your five-act comedy valets," he would say, "but a steady-going, responsible fellow, who knows his business, and goes about it without boring you. He's a proud fellow enough. Sells my old clothes to a Jew, and has his own coats made by my tailor. Never dresses beyond his station, however. He does me credit; and, egad! I fancy he shares in it, though I dare say he's got much more money than I have." I fancy Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant had.

As for the third person in this group, poor little Lily, the child was placidly slumbering in the folds of the great warm shawl. She had cried herself to sleep in the hackney-coach, and her waking, when the vehicle stopped at Rhododendron House, was but for a moment. Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant laid her gently down in the state arm-chair, with its elaborately worked anti-macassar: slightly to the horror of Miss Celia Bunycastle, who had never seen a new pupil permitted to occupy that imposing throne of maroon-coloured morocco, and then stood respectfully in the background, a demure smile mantling on his dark face.

Adelaide Bunycastle admitted in the inmost recesses of her heart that the scene was eminently romantic. It was like Lara; it was like the Corsair; it was like Thaddeus of Warsaw.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blunt had allowed his mantle to drop gently from his shoulders, and accepted with his gracefulest bow the seat offered him by Mrs. Bunycastle, who had reserved the moreen morocco fauteuil for his reception, but had, in stress of upholstery, been fain to fall back on a high-backed chair of walnut wood. He was overwhelming in compliments and apologies for intruding on the ladies at so unseemly an hour; pleaded stress of business, and an imminent departure for foreign parts.

"Ah! he's been abroad, has he?" mused Mr. Drax, in the dark. "The man-servant's a foreigner too. Let's have another look at him." And in his anxiety to obtain a better view, Mr. Drax, slightly derogating from his reputation for discretion, opened one of the doors yet a little and a little more, till it creaked.

Mr. Blunt started. "What the devil is that noise?" he asked, with an abruptness not precisely in unison with the tone of mellifluous suavity he had adopted a moment before.

Mrs. Bunycastle had no time to be shocked at the irreverence of the stranger's query. She was too much flurried by the creaking of the door, and in a nervous murmur laid the blame of the occurrence on the cat. Mr. Blunt seemed perfectly satisfied when the grave, respectful voice of Monsieur Constant gave a fresh turn to the conversation.

He had politely declined the seat offered him by the youngest Miss Bunycastle, and remained standing; but now advanced a couple of paces. "Monsieur, whom I have the honour to serve," he said, "has brought the little girl of whom mention has already been made. Monsieur is ready to pay the sum agreed upon, fifty guineas, for one year's board and education, and only requires a little paper of receipt undertaking that no further demand shall be made upon him until a year is past."

"We don't even know the gentleman's name if we made such a demand," Mrs. Bunycastle remarked, with a smile. "But the young lady must be called by some name or other."

"Certainly, certainly," broke in the dandy. "Call her Floris. I'm Mr. Floris."

"Floris; a very pretty name indeed," said Miss

Barbara, writing it down on a sheet of paper.

“And her christian name?”

The master looked uneasily at the valet. I think he had forgotten his daughter’s name.

“Lily,” said Monsieur Constant, thus appealed to.

As he spoke, the child woke up from her sleep, and thinking herself called, answered with a sob that she was “vay tyde.” The sound of her voice was a signal to the two younger Miss Bunnycastle to hasten to the arm-chair, to unrol the little one from her shawl, to kiss her, and smooth her hair, and fondle her, and go through the remainder of the etiquette invariably observed at Rhododendron House at the reception of a new pupil of tender age. Not that the Miss Bunnycastle were either hypocritical or ill natured. They were naturally very fond of children, but they saw so many, and so much of them.

The required paper was duly made out, and signed by Mrs. Bunnycastle; and Monsieur Constant, advancing to the table, respectfully placed a little wash-leather bag, containing fifty-two pounds ten, in the hands of the schoolmistress. Nothing loth, Mrs. Bunnycastle proceeded to count it; and

even the eyes of her two eldest daughters twinkled as the sovereigns gave out their faint "chink, chink." Barbara Bunycastle was insensible to the gold's seductive sound. Her eyes wandered from the master to the valet, and her soul was filled with wonder and admiration for both. It was like the Cottagers of Glenburnie. It was like the Children of the Abbey. It grew more and more romantic every moment.

"There is only one little thing more," said Mrs. Bunycastle, rather hesitatingly. "Has—a—has your—has the gentleman (she indicated Monsieur Constant) brought the young lady's boxes?"

"What boxes?" asked the dandy, with a polite stare.

"Her clothes—her linen," explained all the Bunycastle family with one voice.

Francis Blunt, Esq., looked at them, generally, in blank discomposure. He turned to Monsieur Constant; but that retainer shrugged his shoulders as though it were beyond his province or his power to interfere.

"Confound it!" cried the dandy. "It's very vexatious; but the fact is, we've forgotten the clothes."

"A nice affectionate father," murmured Mr. Drax, in the dark.

The dilemma was perplexing, but not irremediable. Monsieur Constant explained that Monsieur whom he had the honour to serve, had left Mademoiselle's petit trousseau at his hotel in London. Would the ladies undertake to procure clothes for the child, if a sum were left in advance, sufficient for what she might probably require? Mrs. Bunycastle bowed her head in gracious approval of this proposal. What sum would be requisite? Oh! merely a few pounds. The valet whispered the master. The latter, looking anything but pleased, but, from a purse elegantly embroidered with beads and gold thread, took out a couple of crisp five-pound notes, which he handed to Mrs. Bunycastle. Then he rose, suppressing a slight yawn, saying that it was past eleven o'clock, and that he had detained the ladies an unconscionably long time.

All the women's garments rustled—for they had dressed themselves in silk attire, in expectation of his visit—as he made his reverence of farewell. Mrs. Bunycastle was profuse in her thanks, and protestations of solicitude for Lily's welfare. The young ladies chimed in harmoniously.

"She is to be brought up in the principles of the Church of England?"

"Of course, of course. By all means; eh, Constant?"

Monsieur Constant bowed diplomatically, as though to convey that, professing as he might himself a different creed, he had the profoundest respect for the Church of England, as that of the ladies before him, of Monsieur whom he had the honour to serve, and of the genteel classes generally.

"As her little mind expands," said Mrs. Bunycastle, "no efforts of ours shall be spared, not only to instil into her piety and virtue, but to lay the foundation of clever ornate accomplishments——"

"Thank you, thank you," Mr. Blunt returned, rather hastily, and cutting short a further instalment of the paraphrased prospectus; "when she's old enough, of course she'll learn French and drawing, and that sort of thing."

"And dancing," suggested the valet, in a low, deeply respectful voice.

Mr. Blunt started, as though a wasp had stung him. When he spoke again, there was a strange dry harshness in his voice. "Madam," he said,

turning to the schoolmistress with a sternness unwonted in so urbane a gentleman, "I do *not* want my daughter to learn to dance. Mind that, if you please. No dancing for Miss Lily Floris. I have the honour to wish you a very good night."

He was going. He was on the threshold, when Monsieur Constant whispered to him :

"Monsieur has forgotten to bid adieu to la petite."

With his usual charming grace, he imprinted a kiss on Lily's brow. The little one did not heed him. She had fallen asleep again. He turned, bowed, and touched the tips of all the ladies' fingers in succession. He was unrivalled in the art of touching your hand, without shaking it. The women's garments rustled again as they bent in eddying curtseys. Monsieur Constant bestowed a bow on the company, reverential but not servile, as became his degree ; and Pepper ushered the two to the door, and they went away.

The first thing the Bunnycastleles did when the sound of the hackney-coach wheels had died away, was to bear the lamp and the money into the back parlour, and rejoin the discreet Mr. Drax. Then

they proceeded to count the fifty-two sovereigns and a half, all over again. Then they examined the crisp bank-notes, from the medallion of Britannia to the signature of Mr. Henry Hase. Then they turned to the backs of those documents, scanning the much-blotted dorsal scribblings—the worst pens, the worst ink, and the worst pothooks and hangers in the world always seem called into play for the endorsement of bank-notes—and wondered whether “Blogg,” who dated from Isleworth, or “Cutchins and Co.,” who gave their address in Leather-lane, or “C. J. Gumby,” who seemingly resided at Bow, could have anything to do with the mysterious strangers who had just faded away from their ken, leaving a little child not four years old, a checked woollen shawl, and sixty pounds odd, sterling money of this realm, behind them. They could make nothing of the notes, however, beyond the fact that they were genuine, or of the gold, save that it chinked cheerily, or of either, save that the money looked very nice. Then they drew breath, and interchanged glances of pleasing perplexity.

I think it was Mr. Drax who, with his never-failing discretion, now suggested that it might

perhaps be better to put the "new pupil" to bed, as she had come a long way, and must be very tired. Poor little "new pupil!" The Bunny-castles had forgotten all about her. Adelaide acknowledged with a smile that the little body had quite slipped her memory, and, while she rang the bell for Pepper, requested Barbara to fetch the child from the drawing-room.

The child looked up when she was brought into the cozy back parlour, but did not cry. She seemed to be rather relieved by the absence of the two men who had brought her to Rhododendron House. The dandy's resplendent attire and dazzling teeth, and the valet's coat, cameo, and smile, had alike failed in producing a favourable effect on her. On the other hand, while she submitted to be patted on the head by Mrs. Bunycastle, and severely smiled at by the three young ladies, she took very kindly to Mr. Drax, and, coming toddling towards him, essayed to climb upon his knees, stretching forward one of her plump little hands as though she desired to touch his discreet and mystic neckcloth.

"Ah!" smiled Mr. Drax, as he lifted her up and imprinted a discreet kiss on her forehead, just

at the roots of her hair. "She won't be so very fond of me when she has taken half the nasty things I shall be obliged to give her. Poor little thing! I wonder whether she's had the measles?"

He leaned back in his chair and regarded her in fond anticipation, as though mildly gloating over a subject who was to conduce to the enlargement of his professional experience, and in the increase of his quarterly bills. His reverie was put an end to by the arrival of Pepper, who, like a good-natured woman as she was, had in a few moments stroked Lily's brown curls, kissed her on both cheeks, chucked her under the chin, hoisted her up in her arms, and told her half a merry story about a little girl who was always ready to go to bed, and was, in consequence, much beloved by all the angels.

"This is Miss Floris, Miss Lily Floris, Pepper," Mrs. Bunycastle remarked, with calm dignity. "Her papa, who is going abroad, was obliged to bring her very late. What beds are there vacant, Pepper?"

"There's number two, in the first room, mum," answered the domestic.

"Among the elder girls," interposed Adelaide;

“that would never do. They never go to sleep until daybreak, I do believe, and they’d question her out of her life before breakfast-time. And Mamselle, though it’s her duty not to allow them to talk, is just as bad as they are.”

“There’s five and nine in the second room; but there’s no mattress on five; and as for nine, you know, mum——”

“Well, what do we know?” asked Miss Celia, sharply.

“It’s the bed Miss Kitty died in,” Pepper returned, with an effort.

There was a prejudice in Rhododendron House against sleeping in the bed that Kitty had died in.

“Stuff and nonsense!” cried Mrs. Bunycastle.

“Well, where *are* we to put her?” Adelaide asked, impatiently. “We can’t keep the child up all night.”

Lily looked remarkably wide awake, and as though she intended to remain so. She was playing with the ribbons in Pepper’s cap, and apparently would not have had the slightest objection to the continuance of that amusement until cock-crow. As for Mr. Drax, his discretion stood him in good stead during this essentially domestic con-

versation, and he feigned to be immersed in the perusal of a volume of the *Missionary Magazine* for 1829.

“Well, if you please, mum,” Pepper ventured to represent, “I think that as the dear little girl’s so young, and so tired, and so strange, I’d better take her to bed with me, mum, and then, to-morrow, you know, mum, you can see about it.”

The ladies were graciously pleased to accept this suggestion, and it was agreed to *nem. con.* And then—it being now fully half-after eleven o’clock—Lily and her new guardian disappeared, and the discreet Mr. Drax took his leave, promising to call in on the morrow afternoon, in case his advice should be needed.

“A very nice girl is Barbara Bunycastle,” said Mr. Drax, softly to himself, as he walked home to College-street. “A very nice girl, and one who would make any man’s home happy.”

Both Adelaide and Barbara dreamed of Mr. Drax.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN WILLIAM THE FOURTH WAS KING.

THE epoch, there was no denying it, was a wild and dissolute one. The imprint of the Regent's cloven foot had not yet worn away. A man was upon the throne. He made a decorous king enough in his old age, mainly through the influence of a pious and admirable wife; but his youth had been the converse of reputable. The sons of George the Third had not contributed in any degree to the elevation of the moral tone of the country. The trial of Queen Caroline, and the private life of George the Fourth, had done a good deal towards depraving the national manners. There were no young princesses save one, the Hope of England,

whom her good mother kept sedulously aloof from the polluting atmosphere of the age. The Duchess of Kent and her daughter went tranquilly about from watering-place to watering-place, and gathered shells and weeds upon the sands, and visited poor people in their cottages, and sat under evangelical ministers, and allowed the age to go by, and to be as wild and dissolute as it chose. They hoped and waited for better times, and the better times came at last, and have continued, and will endure, we trust.

Party spirit ran high. We had been on the verge of a revolution about Catholic Emancipation, of another about Parliamentary Reform. Everything was disorganised. There were commissions sitting upon everything, with a view to the abrogation of most things. Barristers of seven years' standing, fattened upon the treasures wrung from the sinecurists, and the pension-holders of the old Black Book. Commissioners and inspectors became as great a nuisance and burden to the country as the clerks of the Pipe or the Tellers of the Exchequer had been. Everybody had his theory for regenerating society, but lacked sincere faith in his own nostrums; and so, after a while, deserted

them. It was a reign of terror without much blood. The warfare was mostly one of words and principles, abusive language being in vogue among perfectly unscrupulous party-writers. Reverence, gratitude, decency, had gone to sleep for a while. O'Connell called Wellington a "stunted corporal," and Alvanley a "bloated buffoon," and Disraeli the younger "a lineal descendant of the impenitent thief." One Cocking had cast himself into space in a parachute, and, coming into contact with the earth, was smashed to death. A crafty Frenchman lured many hundreds of simpletons into taking tickets for a passage in his navigable balloon or aërial ship. Then, timeously, he ran away, and left them with their tickets, and an empty bag of oiled silk. There were people who did not believe in steam. There were others who did believe in it, but held that locomotives and paddle-steamers were only the precursors of the end of the world. Meanwhile, Chat Moss had been drained by Stephenson, and Brunel was piercing the Thames Tunnel. But nothing was settled. Nobody knew where anything was to end. Steam and scepticism and tractarianism and Murphy's weather almanack, the abolition of slavery and the labour of children in

factories, lions and tigers at Drury Lane, and the patents taken away therefrom, and from Covent Garden too; commutation of tithes and reform of municipal corporations, charity commissions and the new Poor-law, chartism, trades-unionism and the unknown tongues; oceans of pamphlets; new clubs starting up all over the West-end; pigtails, knee-breeches and 'hair-powder beginning to be laughed at; the Chancellor jumping up and down on the woolsack like a parched pea in a fire-shovel, instead of gravely doubting and doubting for years, and working no end of misery and ruin, as Chancellor Eldon had done: all these things, with Irish outrages, colonial discontents and embarrassing relations with foreign powers (order reigned in Warsaw and "*Vivent les Polonais!*" in Paris meant the erection of barricades and a tussle between the blouses and the soldiery), made up a chaotic whirlwind of sand and pebbles and brickbats and scraps of paper, the whole accompanied by a prodigious noise, driving peaceably-minded people half blind, and half deaf, and parcel-mad.

Francis Blunt, Esq., and Monsieur Constant, had left Stockwell shortly after eleven o'clock. The hackney-coachman had been well paid, and pro-

mised an extra fee for speed; but the era of rapid Hansoms was yet to come, and it was nearly midnight when the two jaded horses that drew the vehicle clattered over Westminster Bridge. Mr. Blunt felt so exhausted that he was compelled to descend at a tavern on the Surrey side of the bridge and refresh himself with a small glass of brandy. He re-entered the coach, making wry faces, and declaring the liquor abominable. Constant treated the coachman to a glass of ale, but did not presume to accompany his master to the bar of the tavern. He partook, outside, of a moderate sip of his own from a small pocket-flask.

"Why didn't you tell me you had something to drink with you?" said Blunt, pettishly, as he saw his companion replace the flask in a side-pocket.

"I could not venture to ask monsieur——" began the valet, gravely.

"I dare say you couldn't, Constant. You're a sly fox, and always keep the best of the game to yourself. Here, give me the bottle. I have need of a little Dutch courage to-night."

Mr. Blunt took a pretty heavy draught of the Dutch courage, which was, indeed, the very best

French cognac. He took a pretty deep draught of it, for a man of such delicately-strung nerves.

"Capital brandy," he murmured, smacking his lips. "You have a talent for buying the best of everything for yourself. Why on earth did you allow me to go into that atrocious gin-palace?"

"It is for monsieur to lead the way."

"And for you constantly and carefully to avoid following me, and to allow me to fall into the lions' den. Constant, do you know what I have to do to-night?"

"To be bold, and to win."

"You have taught me how to manage the one. I think I can depend on my own presence of mind for the other. But do you know how much I want?"

"Monsieur's wants are extensive."

"And so are yours, monsieur the sleeping partner. Egad, unless I rise from the table a winner of five thousand pounds I am a ruined man!"

"Monsieur's creditors indeed are pressing."

"The creditors be hanged," Francis Blunt, Esq., returned, with much equanimity. "It isn't for them I shall have to sit up till five o'clock this morning. But there are debts of honour, Constant, that must

be paid. I owe Carlton fifteen hundred. I owe the Italian prince, what's his name?—Marigliano—a monkey. I must send that she-wolf of mine a hundred pounds before to-morrow afternoon, or she will be crawling after me as usual. And then my ready money is all gone, or nearly so. I don't think I've got fifty pounds in my pocket. I've dropped over sixty pounds at that school at Clapham, Rhodo-something House, to pay for that little brat:—by your advice, Monsieur Jean Baptiste. I tell you, I must have five thousand pounds out of Debonnair before sunrise, or I am done. I must have ready money to go abroad with, and then Dobree has most of my valuables; and then there are your wages, Constant.”

“And my commission, if monsieur pleases.”

“And your commission, most immaculate of commercial agents. Five per cent., is it not? You go abroad with me, Constant, so that you know I am perfectly safe. By the way, you couldn't manage to take the hundred to the she-wolf to-night, could you?”

“Ready money is not very plentiful,” returned the valet, after some consideration; “but I think I can contrive to obtemperate, by a little finessing,

to monsieur's demand. Might I, however, ask him to promise me one little thing?"

"What is it, Constant: a rise in your wages?"

"Monsieur's service is sufficiently remunerative," answered the valet, and I believe he spoke with perfect sincerity. "It is not that."

"What then?"

"Not to touch the dice to-night. As an amusement, they are admirable; as a commercial operation, they are destruction."

"Confound the bones, I know they are," Mr. Blunt, with some discomposure, acknowledged. "If I had stuck to the coups you taught me at Van-john, I should have made ten thousand this season alone. I never get that infernal box in my hand without coming to grief in some way or other. And yet what money I have won!"

"And what money lost!"

"Your answer is unanswerable. Yes; I will promise you. I will keep my head cool, and won't touch ivory to-night."

"You are going to Crockford's?"

"Must go there, you know. Shan't stop an hour. The only way of luring my pigeon out."

"And then?"

“To the umbrella-shop, of course. The worthy Count Cubford will expect his commission on the transaction, for permission to play Vanjohn in his sanctum. Everybody wants his commission now-a-days. I wonder Langhorne, of the Guards, doesn’t ask for fifteen per cent. for having introduced me to Debonnair.”

“You will be able to afford it if you only follow the instructions I gave you. You—I mean monsieur—must keep his head very cool, and, as much as possible, his eyes fixed on his opponent. Monsieur must never lose his temper, and must never grow tired. Then, if he takes care, and Debonnair is gris enough, he will win his five thousand louis before morning.”

“I believe I shall. Five thousand pounds are more than five thousand louis, most unsophisticated foreigner. Where are we? Oh, Charing-cross. We’ll get rid of this ramshackle old tub here. I shall go to the club, have a warm bath, and then——”

“To St. James’s-street?”

“No. Gamridge’s. After that, the business of the evening will commence. The night is young yet. It isn’t a quarter-past twelve.”

“I shall therefore have the honour to leave monsieur?”

“Exactly, you will have that honour, most courteous Constant. You may also have the honour of staying out as late as you like on this side of six: for I can’t expect to be home before that time; but please sit up for me, that you may know the results of the campaign. It may be an Austerlitz, you know, but it may turn out a Waterloo. Good night. I have no vices to warn you against, for you don’t seem to be troubled with any—or else you are up to them all, and keep them very dark indeed.”

And so saying, Mr. Blunt waved his hand to his body-servant, and strode away in the direction of Pall-Mall.

The valet paid the coachman five shillings in excess of his fare, at which jarvey drove away rejoicing. His master had flung him his cloak before leaving, saying that he would put on an overcoat, lighter in texture, at his club. Jean Baptiste Constant enveloped himself in this garment, but did not throw it into any melodramatic folds. It ceased to be the mantle of a Byronic-looking patrician. It was now merely the cloak

of a highly accomplished gentleman's valet, who knew his cloak and kept it.

"Yes," murmured Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant very softly to himself, as he walked round the hoarding of those old Mews once occupying the area of Trafalgar-square, but then just in process of demolition, "it may be Austerlitz, and it may be Waterloo—more than Waterloo—it may end in St. Helena and captivity, and death. Ah! je tiens l'enfant. Ah, that dear old nabob at Cutchapore who writes such pretty letters about his little niece. Ah! le beau jeu que le vingt et un. Allons voir la Louve."

It was rather late at night to pay a visit to a she-wolf; but Monsieur Constant seemed bent on the enterprise, and diving into St. Martin's-lane, and through the mazes of Cranbourne-alley, was very soon in Leicester-place, Leicester-square.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HÔTEL RATAPLAN.

I DON'T know what has become of the Hôtel Rataplan in these days. The neighbourhood of "Laycesterre-squarr" is no more exempt from mutability than its Anglo-Saxon vicinage; and Rataplan may have faded into decadence, or undergone an aristocratic change of name, or may have been swept away altogether. It is not a matter of much consequence. I am treating of the year '36; and in '36 the Rataplan flourished exceedingly, and was very much the Hôtel Rataplan indeed.

Désiré Rataplan kept it. He was a gross fat Frenchman. He looked not only a landlord, but

a cook ; and a capital cook he was. Who lards fat pullets should himself be fat, and Rataplan was larded all over. He was the most unctuous-looking man it is possible to conceive, and his face, like that of many other fat men, was perfectly pale and colourless. The great art of figure-painters is, I have heard, dexterously to represent flesh that has not an adventitious tint basané in immediate juxtaposition with white linen. For this reason the clumsy painters, when they give us a man or woman dressed in white, usually make the flesh swarthy, or sallow, or sanguinolent. Rubens is considered to have been the only painter who really triumphed over the difficulties of chair contre linge. His successors should have come to the Hôtel Rataplan and studied its proprietor. Rataplan was head cook in his own hotel, and wore the orthodox costume of chef. His jacket, his nightcap, his long apron, his duck trousers, his slippers, were all white, and dirty white. His face and hands were dirty white too, and yet the contrast between his lineaments and his habiliments was marked with satisfactory strength. It was the texture, perhaps, that did it. Otherwise, face and garments were identical. He looked like a pierrot

who had grown fat. No, he didn't, he looked like what he was—a cook.

Rataplan's countenance was so seamed and pitted with traces of the small-pox, that his cheeks presented a not remote resemblance to one of his own colanders. He had very little hair, and that was grey, and cropped close to his head à la mal-content, and all but concealed under his nightcap. Not a trace of beard or whisker or moustache, did he show. Perhaps the heat of the fire had dried up the capillary forces, or the steam of many saucepans had acted as a depilatory. He was splashed in many places with ancient gravy, giving him the appearance of a blotted skin of parchment. He wore earrings. He had a thin gold ring on his left hand to tongue; and, strange to tell, Rataplan wore over his heart a discoloured red ribbon sewed on the breast of his jacket, and which he declared to be that of the French Legion of Honour.

“Received from the hand of the Emperor himself on the field of Arcis-sur-Aube,” he was accustomed to say. “C'est là que nous avons flanqué une raclée à ces canailles d'Autrichiens. Et les Cosaques ! hein ! c'est Désiré Rataplan qui leur

donna à boire et à manger en 1813. Ma parole d'honneur, je les ai accommodés à toutes sauces ces Cosaques."

He declared that he had the cross of the Legion itself, up-stairs in a box. He had not always been a cook. Désiré Rataplan had served in the Grand Army. He had fought at the Beresina. He had been at Leipsic. He only missed Waterloo because the regiment to which he belonged had been stationed behind the Loire. "Et on m'a appelé brigand de la Loire, moi qui vous parle !" he would say.

His regiment, he stated, was the Trente-septième Léger ; but this his hearers would obstinately refuse to believe. That a soldier of the Grand Army should become an hotel-keeper, or a cook, was no such very astonishing thing ; but that so corpulent a man should have served in the light infantry exceeded reason and probability. He endeavoured to reconcile assertion with fact, by stating that he had been drum-major to the Thirty-seventh. But his auditors remained obstinately incredulous. As a sapper and miner, as a heavy cuirassier, as a grenadier of the Old Guard, even, they were willing to accept him ; but they declined all credence to his ever having been a "light bob."

He appealed to his wife. "Madame Rataplan was my comrade," he would say. "She was cantinière to the Trente-septième. She gave her own tabatière once to the Emperor, when he was out of snuff. Davoust has taken la goutte from her, over and over again. Monsieur le Prince d'Eckmuhl was very partial to Madame Rataplan."

To which, Madame, who was a meek brown little woman, usually habited in a chintz bed-jacket and a petticoat of blue serge, as though she had never had time thoroughly to equip herself in feminine attire after resigning the tunic and pantaloons of a cantinière, would reply: "T'as raison, mon homme. C'est moi-z-aussi qu'a servi le Grand Homme."

They were all frantic in their fanaticism for the memory of the great man. In a dozen rooms of the Hôtel Rataplan, his portrait was hung. There was a plaster statue of him in the hall; an ormolu bust over a clock in the coffee-room. Rataplan would have called his hostelry the Hôtel Napoléon, but for the entreaties of his wife, who represented that the establishment was of so humble a character, that to affix the name of the Great Man to it would be desecration. He did a very comfortable

business under the more humble sign of the Hôtel Rataplan, however.

M. Rataplan had two children. Désiré, his son and heir, was away in France, head waiter at Calais, until in the fulness of time it should be his lot to assume the direction of the establishment in Leicester-place. "I should have placed him sous les drapeaux, to serve his country as a soldier," said the paternal Rataplan, "but what is that flag, what is that caricature of the tricolor I see now !

Helas ! soudain tristement il s'écrie :

C'est un drapeau que je ne connais pas.

Ah ! si jamais vous vengez la patrie,

Dieu, mes enfants, vous donne un beau trépas !"

He was very fond of quoting Béranger's *Vieux Sergent*, although he certainly looked much more like the foolish fat scullion in *Tristram Shandy*, than a relic of the Empire. He had a daughter, Adèle, aged seventeen, whose only duties until she was old enough to be married were, as her parents understood those duties, to keep her eyes cast down, and to divide her time between needlework and the pianoforte. She had a tambour-frame in the office of the hotel, and a pretty little cottage piano in her own little sitting-room ; and she

played and sewed and kept her eyes cast down, with exemplary assiduity.

Stay! The list of the family is not quite complete. There was a very large poodle dog by the name of Azor, who in youth had been a sprightly animal, capable of going through the martial exercise and performing numerous other tricks, by means of which poodles have ere this won fame and fortune for their masters, on the public stage. But Azor had grown lazy from long possession of the run of his teeth, in such a land of honey as the kitchen of an hotel. Formerly he used to be shaved, but was now allowed to wear the totality of his shaggy coat, so that he resembled a small Polar bear quite as much as a large poodle.

Finally, there was at the Hôtel Rataplan a prodigious old woman, who was called *La Mère Thomas*. Nobody could tell with precision who she was. Some said she was Rataplan's grandmother. Others, that she was madame's aunt. She was evidently a kinswoman, for she tutoyéd the whole family, called Rataplan *mon bichon*, and his wife *ma biche*, and occasionally boxed the ears of Adèle. *La Mère Thomas* was of immense, but uncertain age. Her complexion was of a fine

mahogany colour, and she wore a moustache that might have been envied by many a subaltern in the Life Guards. On her chin, too, there sprouted sundry hairs, which, but for her otherwise jovial appearance, would have given her an uncomfortable family likeness to one of the witches in Macbeth. La Mère Thomas wore a crimson and yellow pocket-handkerchief bound lightly round her head and tied in a bow in front, another silk handkerchief crossed over her ample bosom and tied behind her very much in the style adopted by the engaging damsels resident in the neighbourhood of Ratcliff Highway, a large gold cross at her neck, a skirt of some indescribable fabric and of no colour at all—people said it had originally been a flannel petticoat pieced with a soot-bag—and carpet slippers, like an upholsterer's assistant. She snuffed continually from one of those little tin boxes with a perforated top, like those which are used to keep gentles for fishing in. She was the night porter at the Hôtel Rataplan; and travellers, whom she had let in very late, declared that she habitually smoked a short pipe after two in the morning. Her conversation was not copious. Her English was monosyllabic, and not abundant,

although she had been at least ten years in this country. She was a hearty old soul, however, and very fond of beer, which she drank by the quart.

Such was the Rataplan family. They were a good-natured group, all very fond of one another, and quarrelling very seldom: as is the foolish manner with these French people.

The hotel was conducted without the slightest ostentation, but was, nevertheless, a sufficiently prosperous speculation. It was eminently French. Turning from Leicester-place into the hotel, you might have fancied yourself at once in France—not necessarily in Paris, but in some provincial town. The hall was flagged with the same dirty marble, decorated with the same sham bronzes, and hung with the same array of shrill tinkling bells. The walls were gay with the same highly decorated placards relating to chocolate, corn plasters, bills, elastic corsets, and hotels at Geneva, Lille, Dunkirk—or, continentally elsewhere. There was a little poky office, with pigeon-holes for the lodgers' candlesticks, and numbered plates and hooks for their keys; a green-shaded lamp on the *escritoire*; limp, green, shagreen-covered registers to keep the accounts in; a long low arm-chair

covered with Utrecht velvet, for Mademoiselle Adèle; another, higher and black leather covered, for La Mère Thomas. Madame Rataplan was seldom seen in the upper regions. She was, in fact, head chambermaid, her assistant being a dirty Irish girl, with a face like a kidney potato, and many chilblains, who got on very well with the Rataplans principally for the reason that they were all Roman Catholics. The *salle à manger* was a long low room, uncarpeted, and the floor beeswaxed; furnished with the usual array of rush-bottomed chairs, the usual litter of half-emptied wine bottles, dingy napkins in dingier bone rings, knives that wouldn't cut, forks lacking their proper complement of prongs, copies of the *Siècle* and the *Charivari* seven days old, and a big mezzotint engraving after Horace Vernet, representing Napoleon rising from the Tomb. Everything was very French indeed. Everything was very dear indeed. There was a *table d'hôte* every day at half-past six, at which the cookery was admirable and the wines were detestable. The hotel was generally full of foreigners. The Rataplan clientèle abroad was extensive; and foreign visitors to England were accustomed to declare that, although the hotel

accommodation of perfidious Albion was in general execrable, that offered by the Hôtel Rataplan was passable, mais diablement cher. They did not seem to be aware of the possibility of any hotels existing anywhere in London out of Leicester-place, or at least "Laycesterre-squarr."

Rataplan, then, prospered. He only kept one waiter: a young man from Alençon, named Antoine, with a red head and a face like a fox. This serviteur appeared by day in a waistcoat with black calico sleeves and baggy pantaloons of blue canvas terminating in stocking feet. At table d'hôte time he attired himself in the black tail-coat and white cravat de rigueur, and carried a serviette in lieu of a feather broom under his arm. He was very good natured, and, save on the question of the reckoning, passably honest. He had taught the Irish servant girl to play piquet with him, and, when any of the lodgers wanted a little quiet gambling, Antoine was always ready with a portable roulette box with an ivory ball. He did not appear to cheat until he was found out.

I have forgotten to state that from basement to roof the Hôtel Rataplan smelt very strongly of tobaccó-smoke.

CHAPTER IX.

INTRODUCTORY TO A WILD ANIMAL.

RATAPLAN was entirely deficient in the Rhododendron characteristic. It was a very late house. Nobody dreamt of going to bed till one or two o'clock in the morning, save Mademoiselle Adèle, who retired at eleven, *comme il convenait à une jeune personne*. The French are accustomed to treat their daughters like children till they are twenty years of age, and their sons like grown up persons when they are ten. The paternal Rataplan came up from the regions of the kitchen towards eleven, and played cards or smoked a cigar with one of his guests for a couple of hours. People used to treat him to innumerable small glasses to hear him brag

of his exploits during his campaigns with the Grand Army, and his colloquy with the Emperor at Montereau; although there were those of a malevolent turn of mind who insinuated that he had never been at the Beresina or at Montereau; but that happening to keep a small wine-shop at the corner of a street in Paris during the three glorious days of July, 1830, a barricade had been erected close to his door, and at a critical moment he had rushed out, and crying "Vive la Charte!" had stricken down a corporal of grenadiers with a soup ladle, whereupon he had become a *décoré de Juillet*.

It was half-past twelve on a summer night—I need not further particularise it, for I have not yet passed the limits of the four-and-twenty hours in the course of which all the events hitherto narrated have occurred—when Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant, in his master's Spanish cloak, entered the marble hall of the Hôtel Rataplan, and passed into the *salle à manger*, as one well accustomed to the locality.

Rataplan was alone, smoking and sipping his "gzogs" (as he was accustomed to call a very little brandy with a great deal of sugar and lukewarm water), and endeavouring to spell through one of

the seven days' old Siècles. The gallant warrior-cook's education was defective. His womankind kept his books and wrote his letters for him.

"How goes it, mon vieux? Touchez-là!" said the valet. And he extended his palm, and Rataplan smote his own palm thereupon, and went on reading.

"Will you smoke?" asked Rataplan, after a moment.

"Business to attend to"—the two men spoke French—"else I would first have presented my homages to the ladies. Is the Countess at home?"

"Half an hour ago. Is having her supper now."

"And her little temper?"

"Ouf! n'en parlez pas. The whole menagerie of the Jardin des Plantes does not contain such a wild animal. The bear Martin, when the nurse refused to throw him the second of her babies, when he had played off the little practical joke of eating the first, was never in such a temper. Temper! It is a mania! A delirium, an ecstasy of spasmodic and anarchical passions. That woman is all the furies rolled into one, plus Frédégonde, Clytemnestra, and Madame Croquemitaine."

Rataplan had been a great frequenter of the Boulevard theatres in his youth, and piqued himself on his familiarity with dramatic literature. He was given, besides quoting Béranger, to spouting long harangues from tragedies, both in prose and verse.

“What is the matter with the Countess?”

“Matter! what else but her diabolical, sulphureous, Mount Etna of a temper can be the matter with her? They are not words, but red-hot lava streams, that flow from her lips. You are Herculanæum and Pompeii before her, and she engulphs you. But, pardieu, she is not the Muette de Portici! She has a tongue as long as an academic discourse. There is no stopping, no satisfying, no pacifying, her. She is implacable in her rages. She comes in here, after midnight; and, without the slightest salutation, says, ‘Papa Rataplan, is my supper ready?’ I make her a reverence. I say, taking off my cook’s cap—an act of homage I would not render to Louis Philippe, roi des Français et des pékins—‘Madame told me on going out that she would take no supper.’ ‘What?’ responds she. ‘Papa Rataplan, you are a ganache! On the instant let me have oysters of Colchesterre, a trout fried,

all that you have in the way of cutlets, a sweet omelette, a Charlotte aux pommes, a salade de mâches, some champagne, Burgundy, Bordeaux, and so forth.' And all this on the instant! 'Madame,' I humbly represent, 'there are no oysters fit for the palate of a lady. There is no salade de mâches. Covent Garden goes to bed at eight o'clock precisely. As to the cutlets, you can have some. As to the omelette, by all means. As to the Charlotte, it is an impossibility, seeing that I have no apples—unless you would condescend to potatoes. As for the wines, you bring them with you, paying me a shilling a cork, and saying that mine are not fit to drink, so you know best. In effect, I am desolated that I cannot give you to eat as you desire; but if you would like a mayonnaise de homard, or some pickelle sammone de chez ce bon Monsieur Quin in the Aimarkette, in ten minutes vous serez à votre aise.' "

"And what does she reply?"

"She tells me to go to the five hundred devils. She outrages the Mère Thomas. She affronts Antoine. That woman's language smells of the stable in which she passes her time. 'Oui, Rataplan,' she says to me, 'je vous considère comme le

dernier des derniers.' And then, forsooth, she must insult my sleeping cherub, and say that poor little Adèle's pianoforte practice distracts her nerves, and that if I do not put a stop to it she must find another hotel. It is likely, eh? When I pay Signor Tripanelli half a guinea a lesson for her instruction, and know that with two years' more practice she will be the first pianiste of the world, and cause Thalberg and Chopin to hang themselves in envious despair."

"Why don't you give her her congé?"

Rataplan shrugged his shoulders. "One does not like to lose so excellent a customer. She is worth ten guineas a week to us whenever she comes to stay at the Hôtel Rataplan. I should not like that Grossous, at the Hôtel Belgiosso, to get hold of her. Tripefourbe, of the Hôtel du Belvédère dans le Soho, has already endeavoured to seduce her away from us. And even the wild animal has her moments of amiability. She gave only last week to Adèle, a brooch—malachite, I think you call it. I saw a snuff-box made of it, which the Cossack Alexander gave to the Emperor at Tilsit. Only yesterday, she threw Adèle a cashmere, a true cachemire des Indes, in which she had burnt a

hole with a red-hot poker, in a rage because milord did not come. Adèle will soon darn up that hole. It is a cashmere of a ravishing nature!"

"Ah! And so milord did not come, and miladi was in a rage. Perhaps she expected him to supper to-night, and his failure was the secret of her temper."

"Tiens, I think not. To be sure, she sent the commissionnaire this morning to the Albany, where milord lives, and he was out, and lo and behold, when she made her appearance this night, there was a note waiting for her—a little pink note—and having read it, she ordered the supper I told you of."

"Then milord may be coming."

"Not at all! A little jockey, with breeches of leather and top-boots, was here not five minutes before your arrival. By word of mouth he delivered the message that his master was very sorry, but could not come. Antoine went up and told her. She flew into one of her sulphureous ecstasies, and nearly strangled him."

"It is now half-past twelve. Is she gone to bed?"

"To bed! She won't seek her couch till three.

She will scold that unhappy Barbette, her *femme de chambre*, till past two. Then she will walk about the room, and smoke like a sapper, and swear like a cuirassier, for another hour. To bed! It is lucky for her bed that she goes to it so late. She must quarrel with the bolster, and kick the counterpane all night."

"I think you had better announce me."

"I warn you that she is exceedingly ferocious to-night, and that grave results may follow even my intrusion to announce you."

"Have no fear. She may bite, but I don't fear her barking. I have been a keeper in the *Jardin des Plantes*, and am not afraid of wild animals. Allons, mon bon. Do as I tell you."

Rataplan rose with anything but a good grace, and murmuring something about the inexpediency of bearding tigresses in their den. He shuffled up-stairs. Constant heard him timorously tap at a door. Then there was a tempest of words audible—confined, however, to a single voice; and after a while the host descended to the *salle à manger* again, with something positively approaching a faint violet flush on his pale face.

"I told you so," he said. "She is a panther of

the Island of Java. A beautiful jaguar. However, if you are fond of wild beasts, there she is. Go, my friend, and be devoured." And he sat down, drew the candle closer to him, mixed himself a fresh tumbler of "gzog," re-illuminated the butt-end of his cigar—a Frenchman never desists until the weed begins to burn the tip of his nose, and then he sticks the stump on the point of a penknife—and so resumed his perusal of the *Siècle* seven days old.

Monsieur Constant went quietly up-stairs, and softly laid his hand upon the handle of the door of the front drawing-room. I must keep Monsieur Constant with his hand upon the handle for the space of two chapters, while I cross the water on an excursion very necessary to this narrative.

CHAPTER X.

BEGINS AN IDYLL.

IN the department of the Bouches du Rhône, and in the neighbourhood of Avignon, there are few prettier villages than Marouille-le-Gency, in the sous-préfecture of Nougat.

There are not ten houses of more than one story, and not above a hundred cottages; but they are all pretty. They are built mostly of stone, or of sun-burnt bricks whitened over, and roofed in with those convex tiles, laid on loose, and secured only by pegs, such as you see in Italian villages. White as are their fronts, they were half hidden by clustering vines. A vineyard, itself, is not ordinarily inviting to the sight. In its picturesque aspect it

exists only in the imagination of scene-painters, in the engravings of defunct landscape annuals, and in the fancy performances, in oil and water colours, sent every year to exhibitions. For real beauty, I will match a Kentish hop-garden, or a Twickenham orchard, against the most luxuriant vineyard in the sunny south. We say little about the south being chronically stormy as well as sunny. It is only on the banks of the Rhine, where the grapes grow in terraces, one above the other, to the very tops of the hills, that a wine-bearing district assumes a romantic look. It is the same with olive-trees. Olives in their saline solution, popularly, but erroneously, supposed to be sea-water, are very nice to eat with your claret, and very nice to talk or sing about in ballad poetry; but a plantation of olive-trees is, next to a field of mangold-wurzel, about the ugliest object in nature you can come across. Hemp beats it. Flax beats it. Clover demolishes it utterly, in an artistic sense. The vines, however, that cluster beneath the cottage roof, and the olives that grow in the front garden, are certainly charming; and Marouille-le-Gency had an abundance of both.

The little river, Bâve, one of the tributaries of

the Rhône, ran right across the village street, and the villagers were great people for clean linen. They were even given to washing themselves as well as their clothes : a strange thing in the south. The village was girt about with real orange-groves. There was an abundance of myrtles. The entrance to the hamlet was planted with gigantic plants of the cactus tribe. The rarest and most beautiful flowers grew nearly all the year in the open air. Turtle-doves cooed from the tiles. Thickets of the maritime stone pine covered the hills behind Marouille, over which frowned the grey mediæval Château of Ocques, once a baronial residence, then a fortress, then a barrack, now a penitentiary.

The "correctionnaires," or inmates of this house of penance, did not trouble the inhabitants much. They were kept with commendable stringency behind the strong stone walls of the Castle of Ocques, where they worked for their sins at sail-cloth weaving, rope-making, and mat-plaiting. Once in six months or so, one of their number escaped ; but Marouille-le-Gency had a breed of strong savage dogs, and, a substantial reward being offered for the capture of fugitives, the refugee was soon hunted down. The house of correction

was principally useful to the villagers as a bug-bear, or *bête noire*, to scare their refractory children withal, who, when they did not behave themselves, were threatened with being sent *là-haut*, up there, to the big old castle.

The inhabitants were mostly small proprietors, each cultivating his own particular patch of vineyard or olive garden, and contriving to make both ends meet, in a scrambling kind of manner, at the end of the year. The necessities of life were cheap. Bread was coarse, but plentiful. Meat was seldom eaten, but as seldom asked for. Beyond a few river trout and some salt fish in Lent, there was no consumption of piscine delicacies. Oranges and grapes cost nothing at all. The country wine cost only four sous the litre, and for luxuries the denizens of Marouille-le-Gency had a profound disregard.

They did not occupy themselves much with contemporary politics. Theoretically they were legitimists, and kept as a fête the anniversary of the grand day A.D. 1815, when Monseigneur Louis Antoine, Fils de France and Duke of Angoulême, had passed through Marouille-le-Gency on his way to unfurl the white flag at Bordeaux. By the

same token, their usual mild natures had undergone an eclipse of ferocity, and they mobbed and nearly murdered Napoleon on his way to Elba after his first abdication at Fontainebleau. The ex-imperial carriage halted to change horses at the village posthouse; the moody occupant was recognised, hooted, insulted, stoned; knives were brandished at the windows; inflamed faces with fiery eyes glared in upon him; and, but for the presence of mind of the mayor, who was known to be a Bourbonist, and who, baring his breast, stood at the coach door pointing to his breast, and crying, "He is a tyrant, but you shall kill me first!" they would have dragged the fallen hero from his vehicle and flung him under the wheels. It is said that Napoleon shed tears of rage and shame at this unmannerly reception, and that as soon as he was clear of Marouille he changed clothes with one of his postilions, and in jack-boots, a red waistcoat, and a hat flaunting with ribbons, clacked his whip, and bestrode the leader, in order to avoid similar insults at the next stage. It must be admitted that, although inveterate against him in adversity, the Marouillais had never fawned upon him in prosperity. They had invariably detested his rule.

The mothers and sweethearts of Marouille cursed him consistently and continually. The flower of their youth had been taken away from their vineyards to shed their blood in his incessant battles.

Nevertheless, for years after 1821, they obstinately refused to believe at Marouille in Napoleon's death, holding that he was still secured by the English with a strong chain riveted to the wall of a dungeon in the island of St. Helena; and as a "bogie" for naughty children he divided popularity with the Château d'Ocques. *Da capo.* For the rest they were very pious, and the most docile of parishioners to their curé, believing implicitly in relics, the genuineness of modern miracles, and the direct intervention of the saints in curing the diseases of cattle, and in assisting the cultivation of the vine. Spells, incantations, second sight, and the evil eye, were in high repute among the Marouillais.

In the year 1825, Charles the Tenth being king of France and Navarre, there came to live at Marouille-le-Gency, as landlord of its solitary auberge and posthouse—a long low tenement by the sign of The Lilies of France—a young Swiss called Jean Baptiste Constant.

He had been, according to his own account, in domestic service, and had saved some money. There was no mystery about him. His appearance harmonised with the signalement on his passport, and his papers were perfectly en règle. He had bought the good will of the Lilies of France out of a notary's étude at Avignon, where it had been deposited for sale by the executors of Madame the Widow Barrichon, who had been its hostess ever since the days of the Great Revolution. Carrier had once set up a guillotine in her back yard, and decapitated half a score of "arestos" there. The villagers declared that, ever since that hideous day, the water of the well in the back yard had worn a purple tinge. The in-coming tenant of the auberge had paid a handsome price for it—twenty-five thousand francs, so the gossips of the village said—half down and half at mortgage on the security of the premises. A man who could command such an amount of capital was looked upon as a personage, and the villagers determined to be very civil to him. The mayor called on him the day after his arrival at Marouille. M. le Curé set him down as one of the future corporation of the fabrique. Fortunately for his peace of mind at Marouille, he

was, although a Swiss, a Catholic, hailing from some canton on the Italian frontier. This was fortunate, because the Marouillais dislike heretics, classing them with gipsies, poachers, and escaped correctionnaires. He was, likewise, a bachelor, of about twenty-eight apparently, and, although somewhat swarthy and down-looking, athletic, vivacious, and, on the whole, a very personable fellow. He brought neither kith nor kin with him to his new abiding-place, and the mothers of the village who had marriageable daughters looked upon him favourably from a matrimonial point of view.

He was a good man of business, and looked keenly after the main chance; but he was no niggard. He was willing to be treated, but could treat, too, in his turn, upon occasion. He soon drove a very prosperous trade at the Lilies of France, and, being postmaster, made a good deal out of the rich English travellers on their way to Nice. He engaged as housekeeper, a strong old woman called La Beugleuse. She was not handsome, and far from amiable, and had a desperate potency of harsh lungs, whence her name; but she was very strong, and had a mania for hard

work. She kept the stable-boys and postilions sober, and up to their duties, and she looked after the lodgers while Constant served in the bar or waited on the customers in the billiard-room. Moreover, she brought a pair of hands with her in addition to her own. These supplementary hands belonged to her niece, Valérie, who, in 1825, was a slut of a girl not more than fifteen years of age. She was an overgrown loutish kind of a lass, and yet, for all her long limbs, seemed dwarfed and stunted about the head and shoulders. Her skin was coarse; her hands were tanned with hard labour; her voice was harsh and strident, her manners were uncouth and boorish. She had magnificent brown hair, which hung about her head and neck in a tangled mass, and she had big blue eyes, at which few people cared to look admiringly, seeing that they were enshrined in a sun-burnt, dirty face. She was an incorrigible slattern, and her temper was abominable. Children are rarely beaten in France; it is looked upon as a cruel and dastardly thing even to box a girl's ears; but no one blamed La Beugleuse when she thrashed her refractory niece with a knotted rope or a leathern trace, or tied her up to one of the mangers

in the stable. It seemed natural that Vaurien-Valérie should be treated like a stubborn horse or mule. She was held up as a warning and example to the insubordinate juveniles of the village. "If you don't mind what's said to you, and give way to your temper, you will come to be flogged and tied up in a stable, like Valérie à la Beugleuse." Nobody cared to inquire what her patronymic was, so they gave her a share of her aunt's nickname.

Perhaps the education she had received was not very conducive to the development of feminine character, or the cultivation of delicate manners. Her mother had died in bearing her. Her father had run away from his employment as a postilion, after drawing a bad number in the conscription, and had then sold himself as a substitute in the army. It was in 1815, when the Emperor was desperately in need of men, and pressing questions were not asked. The substitute was three times promoted, through sheer desperate valour in the field of battle, to the rank of sergeant; and was as many times reduced to the ranks for flagrant misconduct. He didn't drink, he didn't gamble; he was honest, but incurably insubordinate. Fortunately for the glory of France, and the interests

of society, Valérie's father got himself killed at the battle of Waterloo, where he was found by a party of Prussian foragers under a heap of slain, riddled with lance wounds, and his arms firmly locked round those of an English dragoon, whom he had dragged off his horse, and killed by tearing his throat in sunder with his teeth.

La Beugleuse took care, after a fashion, of the little orphan Valérie, who in her cradle bawled more than fifty ordinary babies. La Beugleuse was miserably poor. She earned her daily bread by working in the fields as a day labourer. When Valérie was old enough—that is to say, when she was seven—she too went into the fields, to scare the birds away. La Beugleuse sent her to the village school, but she would learn nothing there. They put her on the fool's cap, or *bonnet d'âne*; they made her kneel across sharp rulers, but in vain. Frequently she played truant, and remained away, among the thickets on the hill, for days together. The curé preached against her in church, for she declined to be catechised, and was the only black sheep among the snowy little flock whom he prepared for their first communion. When she was ten, she might have earned ten sous a day by

picking up stones in the vineyards: but she destroyed more vines than she picked up stones. The curé advised La Beugleuse to send her to Avignon, to a convent, where the good sisters received such undisciplined colts as she, and broke them in with mingled kindness and severity; but Valérie coolly announced her determination of setting fire to the convent and murdering one of the sisters in consecration of the first night she passed under a monastic roof. She was now between thirteen and fourteen, and at about this time Jean Baptiste Constant came to Marouille and entered into possession of the Lilies of France. La Beugleuse took service with him, and Valérie accompanied her. The vaurien soon grew familiar with the stable, and on most friendly terms with the horses and mules, would ride them bare-backed to water, would litter and rub them down, and feed them, and, indeed, was in a short time quite as useful as an ostler. Partly from compassion, and partly from an idea that the girl could be overcome by other means than violence, Jean Baptiste persuaded the housekeeper to abandon her formerly unvaried specific of flogging. For a time the girl went on worse, and was intolerably riotous and rebellious;

but, after a while, she came to show, towards Jean Baptiste at least, a strange surly docility which seemed to be in some degree due to affection, and to some extent to fear. She came at his call, and almost at his whistle, like a dog. She obeyed all his orders without a murmur. A stern word or a stern look from Jean Baptiste was sufficient to render her meek and submissive whenever she showed a disposition to defy her aunt. The mayor, M. le Curé, all the villagers, marvelled at the phenomenon. Valérie was wholly changed.

But a stranger phenomenon was soon to take place. When the girl came to be sixteen she grew with astounding rapidity exceedingly beautiful. Like *Peau d'âne* in the fairy tale, she seemed, all at once, to have changed from a grubby little ragamuffin, a sordid beggar's brat, into a lovely and elegant princess. A princess in rags she might have remained, certainly ; but that the landlord of the Lilies of France brought her back, after one of his visits to Avignon, enough cotton print of Rouen manufacture for two work-a-day frocks, and a piece of mingled silk and wool for a Sunday dress. Valérie, who had hitherto been mocked at and despised, as the lowest of the low, was now

envied. She went through her long-deferred first communion with unexceptionable decorum. She combed out her tangled brown hair, and arranged it in sumptuous plaits beneath a natty little lace cap. She washed her face, and her big blue eyes shone out from the cleared surface, like stars. A film seemed to have been removed from her voice, even as a cataract is removed by a skilful operator from a diseased eye. The voice was harsh and strident no longer, but full of deep rich tones, and low whispers. When she was in a passion now, she was sublime, not repulsive. The angular movements of her limbs were replaced by an indescribable suppleness and grace. She began to dance without ever having learnt. She began to sing without ever having been taught. She was evidently one of those raw creatures who "pick up" accomplishments, or are gifted with them naturally. Her capacity had flowered late, but the product was marvellous in exuberant beauty.

Her curious obedience to the behests of Jean Baptiste Constant endured during a transitory period. When her beauty was definitively manifest, the shackles, as well as the dirt and the coarseness and the clumsiness, fell from her limbs. The

slave became a tyrant. She turned sharply round on the strong old woman who used to flog her, and in a moment, morally, trampled her aunt under her heel. La Beugleuse was dazed and bewildered by this radiant serpent, so suddenly emergent from a scaly skin. She gave in at once, and became Valérie's very humble and obedient servant. Her master, Jean Baptiste, held out a little longer, and once or twice essayed to scold the girl; but she soon determined the relations that were in future to exist between them. "There is only one person who shall say in this house I WILL, and that person is myself." Thus she said, stamping her foot. The innkeeper bit his lips, and, looking at her curiously from under his drooping eyelids, said "I will" no more—so far at least as she was concerned—at the Lilies of France.

CHAPTER XI.

ENDS AN IDYLL.

THE Marouillais began to talk scandal about J. B. Constant and his too precocious stable-girl and chambermaid, for she now officiated in both capacities, still preserving her ascendancy as mistress of the horse, but having a lad to assist her. The mayor warned the innkeeper against the "whispering tongues that poison truth." M. le Curé insisted that, for morality's sake, the girl should be sent away.

"She is fit for something better than a fille d'auberge," he represented.

"Granted, monsieur," returned Constant. "But how is her condition to be bettered?"

"The good sisters at Avignon," hinted the ecclesiastic.

Constant shook his head.

"The good sisters," he remarked, "would, I much fear, be powerless in turning Valérie into a Sister of Charity or a village schoolmistress, and what more could they do with her? It is a pity that she was not sent to them two years ago. Then they might have had the credit of her sudden conversion. For the rest, it is no affair of mine. An innkeeper may have a servant-maid. She is a capital servant, and her aunt is there to watch over her."

It was the curate's turn to shake his head. "Mon ami," he said, "that poor ignorant old woman is a mere baby in the hands of that girl. She can no longer be chastised. The time for the cord and the thong is past."

"I should like to see any one attempting to lay a hand on Valérie," exclaimed the innkeeper, with a sudden start, and clenching his fists. "Ma parole d'honneur! I would exterminate him."

"There is no fear of such an eventuality," the curé returned; "nor," he continued, in gentle reproof, "is there any need for a fallible human

creature to speak of 'extermination'—a terrible power, vested only in Omnipotence."

"I ask your pardon, M. le Curé."

"'Tis granted, my friend. But, nevertheless, get rid of that young creature; if you don't, malicious tongues will continue to wag, and evil will follow."

Constant was privately of the priest's opinion, but certain reasons, at which the intelligent reader may have already hazarded a surmise, rendered him reluctant to follow the friendly advice of his pastor. He passed several days in perplexity, anxiously revolving plans in his mind for modifying the condition of his too handsome servant, when Valérie brought the matter to a solution by a voluntary suggestion that she should be sent to school for a couple of years.

"I am tired of tending horses," she said. "My hands are not yet quite spoiled; but six months more of stable-work will make them as hard as buffalo-skin. I am tired of being ignorant. It is as much as I can do to read the big painted letters under the four lilies on the signboard. I can't write at all. I want to be able to read the *Gazette de France*, and to play the piano, and paint pictures, and write letters, and be a lady."

“Vastly well, mademoiselle,” replied Constant, with subdued irony. “But who, pray, is to pay for your education?”

“That is your affair, not mine. If you choose to send me to school it will be better for you. If you won’t, I will get a livret from M. le Maire, and seek a servant’s place at Avignon. My aunt will give me permission, and you must give me a character.”

The argument was unanswerable. Jean Baptiste had prospered at the Lilies of France, and could well afford the outlay. For the sum of a thousand francs, a lady keeping a boarding-school at Lyons consented to receive Mademoiselle Valérie Sablon—for that was the real name of her aunt—for twelve months, and to instruct her in all the accomplishments. The girl had refused point-blank to enter a conventual school, and had selected Lyons in preference to Avignon, because, she said, she did not wish to meet any of those people of Marouille by chance in their visits to the town. J. B. Constant agreed that in this particular she was in the right; nor, when she left Marouille-le-Gency, did he make public the fact that she was about to proceed to school to receive a polite educa-

tion. He merely said that a married sister of his, who kept an hotel at Lyons, had agreed to receive Valérie, and to look after her morals, and make her useful. La Beugleuse did not care to contradict this statement. Perhaps she was never enlightened as to the real state of the case. In truth, she had not fairly recovered from the state of bewilderment into which the sudden metamorphosis of the little grubby good-for-nothing she had adopted had thrown her. So, when Valérie went away, La Beugleuse looked upon her withdrawal very much in the light of a relief from an embarrassing position.

But why this concealment on the part of Jean Baptiste? Why should the upright J. B. Constant think Lyons preferable to Avignon? Why should he have given an untruthful account of the girl's change of life? The always intelligent reader will have little difficulty in answering these questions.

Yes, the bushy-headed down-looking innkeeper was savagely in love with Valérie. I say savagely, because there was something morose and ferocious in the passion that devoured him. He could not bear the girl to be out of his sight. He chafed at

the necessity of parting with her, even for a time, and for her benefit. He went into silent rages at her caprice, her arrogance, her cool assumption of superiority over him—all ignorant as she was, and next door to a castaway. He loathed and longed to rend in pieces all whom she talked or laughed with. He was madly jealous of her, mere child as she was.

He had no bad designs towards Valérie. At this time he was an honest man, and there was not much harm about J. B. Constant. He had never loved till now. His only hope was, that the girl would be grateful to him. His wish was, that she should grow up a beautiful and accomplished woman, and become his wife.

“I will leave this wretched little hole of a village,” he said to himself in his day-dreams; “I have made some money and can borrow more. I will take a grand hotel in Paris—in the English quarter in the Faubourg St. Honoré. Valérie will be my wife. She will sit in the bureau, in a black satin robe, and with a gold chain round her neck, and keep the accounts. The waiters will bow and call her Madame la Patronne. She will go to mass at St. Roch or the Madeleine. On Sundays,

we will dine here and there, go to St. Cloud, and to the Opera, and the theatres. Jean Baptiste, my boy, you shall be envied ; you shall be happy." So he thought, and so he dreamed. Poor fellow !

"If she should be ungrateful !" a voice sometimes whispered to him. The fear of her ingratitude was a black phantom not to be conjured away. "She cannot, she will not," he would mutter. "If she refuses to love me, I will kill her."

When Valérie had been six months at school, J. B. Constant undertook a journey to Lyons to see her. He found her more beautiful than before. The schoolmistress said that her progress was wonderful ; that she had already distanced many girls who had been in the establishment—and with the advantages of previous education—three and four years ; and that, if she were allowed to remain with her, two years instead of one, she would answer for her leaving, fitted to move in the very highest circles. She did not know that J. B. Constant was a mere village innkeeper. He had seen the world, and served noblemen, and at Lyons he put on his best clothes and his best manners.

There was one drop of bitterness in the hurried account the governess gave of her pupil. Mademoiselle, she said, was a young person difficult to manage. She would not endure reproof. She would not hear reason. Her temper was terrible. "We will make the pension twelve hundred francs a year instead of a thousand, and you must make allowances for Mademoiselle's temper," said Constant. "Poor child, she never knew her mother, and in early years was unkindly treated!" The schoolmistress was as sagacious as well as a sympathising instructress, and for the extra stipend agreed to say nothing more about Valérie's indisposition to hear reason.

When J. B. Constant had an interview with his protégée, the governess being present, she received him with a stately curtsy, and eyes demurely cast down; but when Madame du Verger discreetly left them together, she accosted the innkeeper with a haughty familiarity that was half redolent of the old rough manners of the stable-girl, and half satirical.

"Ah, ça, mon homme!" she cried. "What do you think of me now? Am I grown? Are my hands coarse? Is my voice harsh?"

As he was going away, full of love and hope, though slightly discomfited by this reception :

“And La Beugleuse, the old hag who used to flog me—is she dead?”

“Your aunt is alive, Valérie,” Constant said, with a reproachful look.

“I am sorry for it. Such old witches ought to die. I hate her, and will pay her out for all the blows she has given me. Besides, when I go into the world she will disgrace me. To have an aunt who has worked in the fields! To have an aunt who was a mere beast of burden! Quoi! Mon homme, you must take care that she never leaves Marouille.” And so, with the stately curtsey, in strange disunion with her hard and bitter talk, the girl left him.

She never wrote to her aunt. The old woman was by no means despondent under this neglect. She merely muttered that Valérie would be a good-for-nothing, even if she were married to M. le Préfet, and then went on working harder than ever. To Jean Baptiste the exemplary pensionnaire at Madame du Verger’s wrote with tolerable regularity once a month. Her letters always began “Mon bon ami,” as if this young pauper had been

an empress, and Constant president of a republic. Madame du Verger had suggested "*Mon cher bienfaiteur*," but Valérie had refused point-blank to adopt the formula. She wrote in a bold flowing hand, her letters contained a dry summary of her educational progress—of the books she had read, and the accomplishments she had mastered—and ended, "*Valérie Sablon*" tout court. Madame du Verger had hinted that "*votre toujours reconnaissante Valérie*," would be a slightly graceful acknowledgment of the kindness of the person who was paying for her education, but Mademoiselle Sablon very scornfully replied, "I shall do what I like, and I am not his Valérie."

She left Lyons when she was on the verge of eighteen. This was in 1828. Constant was fearful of her coming back to Marouille yet awhile. He wished her to return only once, as his wife, to astound those who had known her in her poverty and her degradation, and then quit the place for ever. His plan was, that she should enter a school in Paris or in England for another year or fifteen months—not as a pupil, but as a boarder—and that she should then make him happy. He unfolded this scheme to her, in the parlour of the

school, on the very day when he went to fetch her away. He avowed his love, and said, with a smile, that it was pure and honourable.

The girl laughed at him. "What a fairy tale!" she cried. "Beauty and the Beast over again! Yes, monsieur, I am Beauty, and you are the Beast, with your sleepy eyes, and your great black head like a primeval forest. Ah! you thought a pretty grape-vine was growing up for you. Ah! you thought you had but to shake the tree, and the pear would fall into your mouth!"

"Valérie," the innkeeper humbly expostulated, "I implore you not to speak in that mocking spirit. Think of my devotion, of my love."

"I know nothing about it," sneered Valérie. "What should I, a school-girl of eighteen, know about devotion! Love was not taught in this school. It was forbidden."

Again, and with the eloquence which sincerity alone can give, and gives, too, to the most tongue-tied man, he pressed his suit.

"Don't be absurd," was Valérie's reply. "You will bore me. I know nothing of life yet. I have only seen one stupid provincial town. I am tired of schools, whether as pupil or boarder. I have

had enough of books, and want to see the world. I must be free and independent. I don't want to tie myself for life to a stupid old man with a head like a grisly bear. Do you wish to ruin my career?"

"Your career," repeated Constant, in sorrowful surprise. "Valérie, what would your career have been but for me? Ah! do not be ungrateful."

"Do not exaggerate your claims to my gratitude. It appears you had your own purpose to serve, in educating me. You merely picked up what had been abandoned. The next passer-by might have done the same, and not have been a village publican. Men are not so blind as you take them to be. Somebody would have been sure to have discovered the pearl on the dunghill, sooner or later."

So she reasoned with the pitiless logic of an ungrateful heart. There was no moving or softening her. In a moment of justifiable irritation Constant threatened to withdraw his protection. She coolly answered, as before, that her character was unimpeached; that the mayor of her native place was bound by law to give her a passport and a livret; and that she would have no difficulty in

obtaining employment as a servant in town or country. Constant knew that in this matter she had right on her side, and that he could gain nothing by breaking with her. He thought that to lose her would be death or madness to him. He suggested a negotiation, a compromise. Valérie was willing to negotiate—in the spirit and on the same bases recently proposed by his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, when the great Powers remonstrated with him on his flagrant violations of the treaties of 1815, and his atrocious treatment of the Poles. The autocrat, if I remember right (for I am no politician), expressed his benevolent willingness to “show clemency” to the Poles, “after the insurrectionary bands had been dispersed.” So Valérie argued. “Grovel in the dust at my feet,” she implied. “Abandon all your pretensions, and then I may extend some ‘clemency’ to you.” The negotiation was concluded in this wise: When J. B. Constant had told the Marouillais that Valérie was to be placed under the protection of a married sister who kept an hotel in Lyons, he had told a lie—but a white one. There were extenuating circumstances in his fraud. He really had a sister, and a married sister, who kept

an hotel—but she lived in Paris, and not in Lyons. She should go to Paris, and live a year with this sister, Madame Hummelhausen, wife of a German, formerly of the profession of bootmaking, but now principally of certain sixth-rate estaminets on the Boulevards, where he smoked, drank beer, and played endless parties of dominoes, while his wife worked hard at home. She would go to Madame Hummelhausen, but a wardrobe suitable to the position of a young lady brought up in affluence was to be provided for her, and she was to be completely her own mistress. A strange treaty, of a verity! Where one of the contracting parties had all, and the other nothing, and where the pauper dictated terms to the capitalist! And yet such treaties are registered by the bundle in Love's chancery. Constant signed all the protocols, as, in this issue he would have signed away his last crust, his liberty, his life. There was no need for Valérie to return yet awhile to Marouille. She was not so very anxious to see her aunt again. There are handsome and well-stocked shops in Lyons, and the expenditure of some fifteen hundred francs soon furnished Mademoiselle Valérie Sablon with the articles of wearing apparel she

required for the moment. "When I want more dresses," she said to her slave, calmly, "I will write, and you will open a credit for me with Madame what do you call her—Hummelhausen—quel nom de Visigoth! As for jewellery, there will be time enough to think about that, afterwards. That gold cross you were ridiculous enough to buy me yesterday, I shall not wear. It is absurd. Je ne suis pas vouée à la Vierge, moi!"

The innkeeper uttered a low moan of rage, disappointment, wounded love.

"I thought you would have admired it, Valérie."

"And I don't. Take me to the Palais Royal, and I will talk to you about ornaments. How I long to see that Palais Royal! These Lyons goldsmiths are barbarians."

He had taken a place for her in the coupé of the diligence to Paris, and was bidding her farewell. He looked at her with gloomy, greedy eyes.

"*Ah! bah!*" she cried; "one would think you were the wolf, and I Little Red Riding Hood. Is it for my pot of butter that you make those great

eyes, monsieur ! What large eyes you have, grandmamma !”

Constant abandoned further conflict. “ I am ready to accompany you to the coach-office,” he said, with dolorous meekness.

“ There is a good little wolf. You’ll make Little Red Riding Hood quite fond of you if you go on in that way.

Je pourrais m’amouracher,
Je pourrais m’amouracher,
Je pourrais m’amouracher,
D’un riche, riche, riche, très riche richard.

Do you know the chanson ? The master didn’t teach it me. The girls used to sing it in the dormitory under the bed-clothes. Ah ! we learn a great deal at school.”

“ I am ready, Valérie.”

“ And I too. It is agreed upon, n’est-ce pas, that you leave me in peace for six months ?”

“ For six months I will not trouble you. I will not even write to you if you are averse to receiving communications from me. What I have to say shall be said through my sister.”

“ No ; that looks like surveillance. Write to me : it will amuse me.”

A gleam of passionate satisfaction shot across Constant's face.

"I will write," he said, his heart palpitating.

"But no long letters. No love, or nonsense of that kind. Don't bore me. Now I am ready. Nay, perhaps you would like to kiss my hand."

She held out her hand to him as she spoke. She had never granted him that slight favour before. It was not a small hand. She was a grandiose woman; but it was very white, and soft, and plump. Who to look upon it could have thought that it had drawn country wine for bumpkins and stable-boys, or wielded a pitchfork to toss stable-litter about?

He accompanied her to the coach-office, put her in her seat, wrapped her up in warm shawls and rugs, placed a basket full of dainties and wine by her side, and would have pressed if not kissed her hand once more, even in the open coach-yard, but that she said sharply:

"Enough of that! You nearly bit my hand just now, besides all but wrenching it from the wrist. You are too affectionate, mon homme. Good-by, and go back as fast as ever you can to that stupid old Marouille-le-Gency. Adieu!

Love for you, life for me!" And the diligence clattered and rumbled away Parisward, and Jean Baptiste Constant was left desolate.

He could not make up his mind to return to the village. He wandered about Lyons for two whole days. He called again on Madame du Verger, asking her futile questions. The school-mistress knew well enough what ailed him. He had been a good customer, and she sympathised with him. The girl had left some inconsiderable fal-lals behind her—a gauze scarf, a pair or two of gloves, a piece of music. These were given to him, and he treasured them with burning avidity. Then he went to the theatre, and tried to listen to an opera; but the mocking voice of Valérie rose high above the braying and tinkling of trumpet and cymbal, and the flourishes of the singers. He went from café to café, and drank deep—which was not his custom; but Valérie's scornful accents were audible, to him, above the clattering of the dominoes, the jangling of the coffee-cups, the cries of "Trois, six!" "A qui la pose!" and the shrill "V'là monsieur!" of the waiters. Valérie's face was in the cup, and Valérie's form wreathed itself out from the thready

vapour of the cigars. At last he went back to Marouille, to see after the wants of the billiard players, and to scold the postilions and stable-boys. But, two days after his return, he went to Avignon, and instructed the same notary of whom he had purchased the good will of the Lilies of France, to advertise the Lilies again for immediate disposal.

It was a month before any reasonable offer was made. At last a customer was found, in the person of an Avignon linendraper, who thought that country air would do him good. After much haggling, he agreed to give forty thousand francs for the premises and good will—a considerable advance on the sum Constant had paid for them; but, by his energy and perseverance, he had much improved the property. He had written to his sister to inform her of his approaching departure, but begged her to keep it, for a while, a secret from Valérie. He wished to be in Paris without the girl's knowledge. His successor in the post-office promised, in case any letters arrived for him with the Paris postmark, to re-direct them to him. Then he took his place in the diligence, and, in two days' time, found himself in the French capital.

When he arrived in Paris he wrote to his sister, telling her to meet him at an obscure furnished lodgings in the Marais. The Hummelhausens lived in the Rue St. Lazare, in one of the noisiest, liveliest quarters of the brawling capital. Madame Hummelhausen came, and brought her budget of news with her. Valérie was more beautiful than ever. She had engaged a music-master. She sang divinely. She was passionately fond of the Opera and the theatres; but her temper was insupportable. "And I for one will not put up with it," quoth Madame Hummelhausen. Jean Baptiste, my brother, you are a simple. Turn this girl out of doors if she won't have you, and make the happiness of some honest woman whose temper does not turn the world topsy-turvy, and who knows how to love and obey a good kind man."

J. B. Constant was far too much in love to see the force of this argument. He implored his sister to wait until the expiration of the stipulated twelve months—or at least of six, when he would see Valérie, and come to some definite understanding with her. Meanwhile, faithful to his promise of leaving Valérie in peace, he waited patiently for the post from Avignon to bring him that long-ex-

pected re-directed letter with the Paris postmark. But it never came. At his instigation, Madame Hummelhausen gently hinted to Valérie that it might be as well to write a line to her brother.

“A quoi bon?” retorted the girl. “That my letter should travel five hundred leagues backwards and forwards to no purpose? Do you think I am an idiot? The great dolt is here. Yes; Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant has been prowling about Paris these two months, engaged in the highly dignified occupation of playing the spy over a young girl. Since when have you kept spies in your family, madame? Does Monsieur Constant belong to the police? I have caught sight of him hundreds of times, on the Boulevards, in the Luxembourg and Tuileries gardens, at the theatres, at church even. What does he mean by this insolence, in dogging my footsteps? Why does he not come here, like an honest man, and tell me what he wants?”

“He promised to leave you in peace for six months,” pleaded Madame Hummelhausen.

“Let him come now. I wish to see him. I have something to say to him.”

He went to her, his heart bounding with the

hope that she had relented; that she would say to him, "Constant, I have teased you long enough. I am changed. I am grateful. I am yours." But, the nether millstone still held its place in her breast. She received him with the old mockery, the old disdain. Her inflexibility had gotten a Parisian gloss upon it, and would have been horrible, had she not looked more beautiful than ever.

"I am sick of being a pensioner," she said; "of being told that I ought to be grateful for this and for that. I want to be free, and to earn my own livelihood."

She had the hardihood to tell Jean Baptiste that she wished to go on the stage. "I have a mission for the dramatic career," she said, with lofty conceit. "And you should enter me as a student of the Conservatory, as a singer, or a dancer, or an actress; but that I abhor discipline, and before a week was over should undoubtedly box the ears of one of the professors. Imagine boxing the ears of Monsieur Cherubini! No; I must go where I can give orders, instead of receiving them."

She unfolded her plans. She had made acquaintance, through the Hummellhausens, with one

Duruflée, who had a kind of private theatre for dramatic aspirants at the Batignolles. She would pay him a premium—the funds, of course, to be furnished by M. Constant—and would practise among his pupils for a few months. Then Duruflée would get her, for a commission, an engagement at one of the petty Boulevard theatres. Thence to the Gaîté, thence to the Porte St. Martin, thence to the Théâtre-Français.

J. B. Constant understood, and shuddered, but he did not demur.

“And after that?” he asked.

“After that, we shall see,” she replied; “after that, if you are very, very quiet, and well behaved, the ice may melt. How many years did the bon homme Jacob wait for Laban’s daughter?”

’Twas the first inkling of a promise she had ever given him. It threw him into an ecstasy of joy. He agreed to all she asked. Madame Hummelhausen was glad to be rid of her troublesome charge, but said little to encourage her brother’s hopes. “She has no heart, not an atom,” she persisted. J. B. Constant would not listen to his sister. He would not have lent an ear, where Valérie was concerned, to Solomon, or to Nathan

the Wise, or to the seven sapient men of Gotham. What could those last-named wiseacres have done beyond advising him to go to sea in a bowl? And was he not already launched upon the ocean in a skiff quite as frail?

Valérie chose to have apartments of her own, at the Batignolles, close to M. Duruflée's private theatre. This worthy had been a chorister at the Académie till he lost his voice, when he turned chef de claque, or head of a band of hired applauders at the theatre. He lost his place through venality—for there is a code of honour even among claqueurs—being detected in taking money from two rival actresses who were to make their début on the same night. The claque applauded both. The two affirmatives made a negative: neither triumphed. The rivals were furious; the direction scandalised, and Duruflée had his congé. After such a Fontainebleau (if to be kicked out can be considered an abdication) there was clearly no Elba for the banished potentate of the claque but in the Rue de Jérusalem. He became affiliated to the police; then he served the Tribunal of Commerce as one of its bailiffs; then he went on the Bourse, and, by assiduous speculation for a fall,

contrived to win some ten thousand francs of the basest money in the world. His dramatic propensities were still strong within him, and he invested his gains in the organisation of a Théâtre de Jeunes Elèves at the Batignolles. He was very fat, good natured, clever, gross, humorous, astute, and a consummate blackguard. He still kept up his connexion with the Préfecture. His insatiable thirst for absinthe made him one of those rare monstrosities—a drunken Frenchman ; but he was a better spy when intoxicated than when sober.

In the spring of 1831, Valérie, being then in her twenty-first year, made her first appearance at the Folies Dramatiques. She came out in some sanguinolent drama of the then new romantic school. She represented some great wicked lady covered with guilt and diamonds, and created a furore. The wickedness she was enabled to portray with rare fidelity from her accurate observation of human nature. It was J. B. Constant who found the diamonds. The money he had received from the sale of the inn at Marouille was all gone by this time. He was taking up money at a hundred per cent. from the usurers. He had borrowed from his sister all she could afford to lend, and

more; but Valérie wanted diamonds, real diamonds—she laughed paste to scorn—and she had them. If she had ordered J. B. Constant to forge the name of M. Jacques Lafitte to bills to the extent of five hundred thousand francs, with a certainty of the court of assizes, the pillory, and the galleys, in perpetuity, commencing from the very next day, he would have obeyed her.

She was soon engaged at a handsome salary, at the Porte St. Martin. Her wish was attained. She was free and independent; but she did not offer to give back to J. B. Constant the money he had spent on her education, or the diamonds he had lavished upon her. On the contrary, she wanted more diamonds from him, and she had them. J. B. Constant was living, in usurers' clutches, at the rate of fifty thousand francs a year, and his clothes were growing shabby, and he dined every day at a restaurant for thirty-two sous.

Valérie played in a piece in which she had to wear a robe of flame-coloured satin, and to show a considerable amount of her legs. Paris was entranced. A sculptor modelled the legs, in wax, and they were exhibited, under a glass case, in the

Galerie d'Orléans. Her bust was carved. Her portrait was lithographed. Béranger went to see her. His criticism was conclusive, but not complimentary. "Vous n'êtes pas Lisette," he murmured, and walked out of the box. The romancer, M. Honoré de Balzac, then beginning to make his way in literature, looked at her, long and anxiously, through his opera-glass. "She is a Cossack in petticoats," he said, "and will occupy Paris."

Up to this time she seemed impregnable. Diamonds, from other quarters than poor Constant, were laid at her feet. She took them up and laughed in the face of the donors. She had a wonderful power of digestion. She took everything—songs, dedications, money, jewels, bouquets, love-letters, compliments, and gave nothing in return, but scorn. She was a Bacchante in cold blood. She was Venus rising from the ice.

At this time there was a great English dandy in Paris, by the name of Blunt. The French had got it into their heads that he was "Sir François Blunt, Baronnet;" but, titled or untitled, they persisted in declaring him to be the wealthiest and most sumptuous of milords. He lived in great state, on a first floor in the Rue de la Madeleine.

He associated with all the English aristocracy resident in or visiting Paris. He played high, at Frascati's and elsewhere. He had his baignoires at the little theatres. He gave his dinners at Véfour's, or the Rocher de Cancale; he gave his suppers at the Café Anglais. He drove a four-in-hand—a vehicle the Parisians had never set eyes upon before—a cabriolet, a phaeton, a dog-cart—he drove anything you please. He was a capital French scholar, and a great favourite in women's society. He could ply the small-sword if challenged, and could hit the ace of hearts thrown up in the air, with a pistol-shot at fifty paces.

Blunt was a great play-goer. He went to the Porte St. Martin to see the actress after whom all Paris was flocking. It is not very difficult for an Englishman, who is cultivated and fashionable, and is supposed to be rich, to procure an introduction to a French actress. He was in a short time permitted to make his obeisance to Valérie. There was a quiet mocking manner about him, a polished impertinence, which at first pleased her infinitely.

“At all events,” she said, with an engaging candour to Constant, in one of the rare audiences she now granted him in the forenoon, and in her

boudoir, "he is neither imbecile, like the young Frenchmen who buzz about me, nor ridiculous, like the English dandies. If he is insolent, he is witty. If he can give sharp stabs, he can take them. He pleases me, ce Sir Blunt."

She believed in the stories of his rank and wealth, although she often said that it mattered little to her whether the man she chose to favour was a prince or a rag-picker. She determined, on New Year's Day, 1832, to give a grand supper in a gorgeous new suite of apartments she had taken in the *Chaussée d'Antin*. Half the fashionable *roués* and actresses in Paris were to be there. She was good enough to ask Constant to come—and also to condescend to borrow from him a thousand francs towards the expenses of the entertainment. Constant gave her the money, and found himself at four in the afternoon of the day on which the party was to come off, with exactly twenty-seven francs in his pocket. He was proceeding to dine at his usual thirty-two sous restaurant in the *Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie*, when he was arrested on two bills of exchange for ten thousand francs each, held by one Nabal Pixérifort, a Jew, and was carried off to a debtors' prison.

Some other judgments crowded in upon him, and he found himself detained for a total of sixty thousand francs. As a foreigner, he was liable to lie in prison for a long term of years, his creditors being merely bound to pay a sum of ninepence-halfpenny per diem for his maintenance; but fortunately he had not been incarcerated a month before he found succour. The Hummelhausens, who were worthy people, would gladly have “executed” themselves—that is to say, would have sold their hotel stock, cock and barrel—to help their suffering kinsman, but there was no need for this. An uncle of the Constants happened to die at Ticino, leaving an inheritance of two hundred thousand francs. The use of this, for her life, he left to his wife, who was eighty-two years of age, and bedridden. At her death, a hundred thousand francs were to come to Jean Baptiste, and fifty thousand to the Hummelhausens. The prisoner found no difficulty in selling his reversion for a hundred and twenty thousand francs. He paid the usurers in full, and left the whitewashed walls, comparatively a rich man.

On the day of his enlargement, and while he was treating to a *vin d'honneur* some of the gentleman

captives in the establishment, one of the turnkeys brought him a copy of the *National*, asking him if he would like to look at it. The ex-innkeeper's eye fell on a paragraph, in which it was stated among the *Faits Divers* that one of the "illustrations dramatiques," or theatrical celebrities of the day, "la belle Mademoiselle Valérie," had suddenly broken her engagement with the direction of the *Porte St. Martin*, and winged her way to the "brumous" land of Albion, where she was "incessantly" to be united in marriage to the Honourable Sir Francis Blunt, Baronet, and member of the Upper Chamber.

Jean Baptiste Constant rushed out of prison to his sister. He had written to Valérie half a dozen times since his arrest, not asking for money, but craving a word of sympathy. She had not sent him one. His devotion to her was so servile, so houndlike, that he had never murmured. Madame Hummelhausen had no good news to tell him. The paragraph in the *National* was true. At least she had Valérie's word for its genuineness. The girl had written her a cool letter from Dover, saying that she had been married there, and that she was now Miladi Blunt. "As to Constant," she went

on, "you will say to him that I am very sorry for him, but that he bored me." This was his dismissal: this his recompense for all he had done to train and nurture this beautiful devil. She had married another man. She was sorry for Constant; but he bored her; he made her yawn; she needed amusement, and the other man could amuse her. There was an end of the idyll.

Constant said nothing, but asked Madame Hummelhausen to give him the letter. "I shall go to England," he said.

"To kill Sir Blunt?" asked his sister, terrified.

"We are not in the middle ages. Lucrèce Borgia is all very well on the stage, but will not do in private life. I have been in England before. I have served in noble families. I have the most flattering testimonials. I will serve in noble families again. Good-by, my good sister. Perhaps some day I shall have the high honour to stand behind Miladi Blunt's chair."

Miladi Blunt's honeymoon was soon over. The honeymoon was very speedily followed by the bees-wax-moon, and that, by the gall-and-wormwood-moon. Valérie discovered that she had wedded a gentleman with no money, and who was over head

and ears in debt. Blunt told her so plainly, and that it was useless to think of going to London. They crossed from Dover to Ostend, and thence went to Brussels, where, Valérie's Paris prestige being thick upon her, she easily obtained an engagement. This was in the spring of 1832. By December, in the same year, they had separated. Her accusations against her husband were no fictions. He had insulted, outraged, beaten, her. He had lived in luxury upon her earnings. She gave birth in Brussels, and at Christmas-time in this same year '32, to a child, a girl, who was christened Lily by the English chaplain resident in the Belgian capital. The day after the performance of the ceremony, Blunt deserted his wife, but took his child and his child's nurse with him. He had made an acquaintance in Brussels at this time, who lent him money, and talked to him of brilliant prospects, but whose name he kept secret from Miladi. The acquaintance accompanied him to England, and there became his valet de chambre. And this valet's name was Jean Baptiste Constant, Swiss by birth.

After her abandonment by her legitimate protector, the career of Madame Valérie Blunt was

rather more varied than reputable. She did not bewail the loss of her infant much. She was more in a rage with the infant's papa. She went back to Paris, and purged her contempt towards the direction of the Porte St. Martin by payment of a round sum of money which somebody paid for her. Somebody had become necessary now; and when she grew tired of somebody, she changed somebody. But, although her beauty was now in its zenith, her prestige as an actress was gone. Some other "*illustration dramatique*," who showed more of her legs, wore a grass-green tunic, and had more diamonds than she, was convulsing Paris with admiration. "I will never sink to the second-rate," said Valérie. "I am tired of men and women. Let us see what can be made out of horses."

Madame Hummelhausen and her husband, going, one summer night, in 1834, to Franconi's Circus, saw Valérie, in a riding-habit and a man's hat, caracoling on a beautiful brown mare in the midst of the tan-carpeted ring. Stout Monsieur Adolphe Franconi followed her obsequiously, not so much as venturing to crack his whip. Monsieur Auriol, the clown, suspended his jokes during her performance. She was doing the *haute école*. Va-

lérie of the Circus, had become a greater celebrity than Valérie of the Porte St. Martin. She was the rage. When she came to England in the summer of '35, and to Astley's Theatre, Mr. Ducrow gladly paid her thirty guineas a week salary. She came again in '37 at higher terms; but she always wanted money, and more money.

This was the lady who was good enough to patronise the Hôtel Rataplan. Constant had found her there, and walking straight up to her room, had looked at her. She would have struck him, but there was something in his look that cowed her. He was no longer humble; no longer her slave.

She held out her hand.

"Let us sign a treaty. Allons! Let us be friends!"

So, without pens or paper, and on the basis of this protocol, the treaty was signed, and they were friends, after a fashion. And now that I have kept Monsieur J. B. Constant so long with his hand on the handle of the She-Wolf's door, he may surely turn it, and go in.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WILD ANIMAL.

MONSIEUR CONSTANT, giving one low but authoritative tap at the door of the front drawing-room, turned the handle, and found himself in a moment in the presence of the "wild animal."

She was not lying on straw. There were no bars before her. She was not grovelling à quatre pattes. The wild animal was merely a very beautiful young woman in a black satin dress and with a great diamond necklace round her neck, and great diamond bracelets on her arms. Neck and arms were bare.

"I put on these for him. I dressed for supper," she cried, in a fury, so soon as she saw the valet,

“and the traitor sends me word that he cannot come! Sends me word by a vile little jockey—a lacquey. He has the soul of one,” she continued, paraphrasing, perhaps unconsciously, Ruy Blas. “I will poison him. I will trample upon him. My next guest shall be that brute of a German ambassador, who eats onions and drinks stout.”

The Countess was a Frenchwoman, *pur sang*.

“Tut, tut, tut,” quoth Monsieur Constant, in French. “What a disturbance you raise, to be sure. You should have devoted yourself to melodrama, Madame, and not to the manège. What a pity that you should now have nothing better to say in public than ‘Haoup! hup là!’ and that to a horse too!”

“Coquin!” screamed the lady. “Are you come to insult me?”

“Do you want to wake Mademoiselle Rataplan, who sleeps the sleep of the just? *She* does not ask milords to sup with her. Nor would you—were you wise—the wife of an English gentleman, un fashionable, un lion, quoi!”

A deep crimson veil—a blush, not of shame, but of rage—fell, like a gauze in a scene in a spectacle, over the woman’s white neck and arms. She set

her teeth for a moment and ground them, and then, starting up, began with the passionate volubility of her nation :

“The wife of an English gentleman ! The wife of a swindler, un escroc ! a gambler, a rascal ! He was to have millions, forsooth. I was to have a carriage. I was to have horses, parks, châteaux.”

“Well ; you have four horses as it is.”

“Yes. My beautiful husband allows me to become a horse-rider in a circus. I am the Honourable Lady Blunt.”

“Not a bit of it. Your husband is not in the least a titled personage. He is an English gentleman, nothing more.”

“He is a swindler, a gambler, a rascal !” the lady repeated, with concentrated bitterness. “Enfin, I am the wedded wife of Monsieur François Blunt. Monsieur je suis votre très dévouée ! Oh ! he is an angel, my husband !”

“Mon père m’a donné pour mari,
Mon dieu, quel homme, quel homme petit.”

Thus softly whistled between his teeth Monsieur Constant.

“Say, rather, un homme lâche—a prodigy of

baseness. He married me by subterfuge and fraud."

"He did," Constant echoed, agreeing with the wild animal for once; "subterfuge and fraud are the words. *Après.*"

"His millions turned out to be all in protested bills, long overdue, and for which he was responsible. He was *criblé de dettes*. He made me dance and sing at his infamous supper-parties for the amusement of his vagabond aristocrat friends. It was I who paid the champagne à ces beaux festins. Monsieur was not too proud to draw my salary month after month. Monsieur was unfaithful to me."

"*Vous lui avez donné la réplique, ma belle.*"

"He insulted me, neglected me," the lady went on, seeming not to have heard the valet's scornful remark. "He beat me. Beat ME, on whom no parent or governess ever dared to lay a finger."

"Don't you remember the Beugleuse. You tried to strangle Blunt twice, to stab him once. You would have put something in his coffee had you dared."

"Only when the marks of his hands were on my face. There are women who like to be beaten."

He should have married one of them. I tell you he is un lâche."

"I know it was not a happy ménage. Love flew out of the window soon after the honeymoon, and the furniture flew after it. You used to smash a great deal of crockery-ware between you. Well; you would have your own way. It has brought you to the Hôtel Rataplan."

"He deprived me of my child—of my little Lilé," the lady went on, after a few moments' silence, during which her bosom heaved, and she panted: as though want of breath, and not want of grievances, compelled her to a temporary surcease in invective.

"No," cried Constant, quietly. "You have nothing to accuse him of, with respect to the child. *He* didn't deprive you of it. *I* did."

"Monster!" cried the lady. Her looks, however, did not bear out the acerbity of her speech.

"Benefactor rather. I did not choose to have the little one continue in the inferno its papa and mamma were making round it. If Blunt had been left alone with it, he is so lazy, insouciant—thoroughly and incurably heartless, if you will—that he would have left it in the street, or sent it to

the workhouse. Had it been confided to you, it would have had its brains dashed out in one of your mad rages; or else it would have been educated for the pad-saddle and the circus. One Amazon in a family is quite enough, Countess."

He gave her the name bestowed upon her, half in envy, half in mockery, by her comrades of the theatre: whom she offended by her haughtiness, and terrified by her temper.

"Bon; and the child, where is it?"

"Safe and sound, at school. When she is old enough, she shall be a nun, and pray for her wicked papa and mamma."

"It is the child of Francis Blunt, and that is enough to make me hate it," said the woman.

"A pretty speech for a mother. Nature, you are a potent influence! To be sure, you have scarcely ever seen the poor little thing. It was ample time, however, to deprive you of it. Since the morrow of her christening you have never set eyes upon her. I will take care you never do again, if I can help it. Your tenderness is of a dangerous nature. When Heaven gave you that beautiful form, and that brilliant intellect, how was it that so trifling a matter, such a mere bagatelle, as a heart, was left out, Madame?"

As he spoke, he raised his flaccid lids and gazed upon her with gloomy intensity. She tossed her head scornfully, and adjusted the glittering trinkets on her arms.

"Do you wish to revive the old story?" she asked. "I thought that in our treaty of amity and alliance, offensive and defensive, there was a secret article to the effect that nothing ever was to be said about the days when we were young and foolish."

"When *I* was young, and a fool, a madman," the valet retorted. "I am growing old, now. You are still young, but foolish no more. You never were. Oh no! You were always wonderfully wise!"

"As you please," the wild animal, who had become strangely tranquil, perchance through sheer lassitude, uttered. "I must beg you, however, not to bore me with these old histories of Colin and Jacqueline. They are all very well in pastel, or in porcelaine de Saxe, but they bore me in prose. What do you want here, so late at night?"

"We are both night-birds. My visit in the end will be a welcome one. I have brought you a hundred pounds from your husband."

“Donnez!” said the lady, coolly, and held out her hand.

“Not so fast. I know your capacity for absorbing money. Certain conditions, and not very hard ones, are attached to this advance. We, that is Monsieur,” he was respectful to the dandy even in his absence, “must not be annoyed for six months.”

“And you offer a miserable hundred pounds? C’est peu.”

“It is all we can give. Business has not been prosperous. Times are very hard with us; and even this hundred pounds can be ill spared.”

“I dare say. Times also are very hard with me. But tell me, Monsieur l’Ambassadeur, has my precious husband any funds of his own?”

“Not a sou. He ate up his patrimony years ago.”

“Have you?”

Constant shrugged his shoulders. “What can a poor domestique at wages be worth?” he replied.

“Then it is stolen money. You have stolen this hundred pounds. Keep it. I will not have it.”

“Hypocrite! Your mouth is watering for it,

and you only wish that it were ten times as much. No, Madame, it is not money stolen ; it is money won."

"By cheating?"

"As you please. I have it here, in five-pound notes."

"Give it me, then. I don't think my husband has yet devoted himself to forgery. He has not application enough. You may tell him from me that I shall not trouble him again for six months."

"What are you going to do with your milord?" the valet asked, with a darkling look.

"C'est mon affaire. But if you must know what I mean to do with milord, then by Debonnair it is to bleed him for the good of his constitution. Il a trop de sang, ce moutard-là."

"He is not of age."

"The usurers are kind to him."

"You do not love him?"

"Did I ever love anybody, Jean Baptiste Constant? It is growing very late. I think you had better give me the money and let me go to bed."

He handed her a packet of notes.

"Thank you. It is not much, though."

"Good night, Valérie."

“Hun?” quoth the wild animal, with a look of simulated surprise, but profound disdain. “Since when, Monsieur who brushes my husband’s clothes?”

“Good night, Mrs. Blunt, then.”

“The Honourable Lady Blunt, you mean!” but this last she said in mockery. “Be sure you give my love to my husband.”

“I will give him as much love as you send him ; and shall not waste much breath. Again good night.”

“Good night, my bear.”

He had never taken a seat during the interview, but had half stood, half lounged, against the console on which he had placed his hat. Without directing another glance towards her, he left the room. His face had turned white, and he was trembling all over. But he had great command over his emotions, and by the time he reached the *salle à manger* his countenance was as unruffled as ever.

Rataplan had gone to bed. Constant, however, was an old habitué of the house, and made himself comfortable with the female night-porter, La Mère Thomas. He was no smoker ; but she brewed him

some mulled claret, of which he partook in moderation. And so remained, after a game or two at dominoes with the mahogany-coloured sentinel, until past four in the morning. His conversation was mainly about the "Countess" and her temper.

CHAPTER XIII.

TO GAMBRIDGE'S.

GAMBRIDGE'S HOTEL was in Pump-street, Regent-street. Gamridge's was much frequented by the junior members of the aristocracy, and by officers bearing his Majesty's commission. Gamridge's was the legitimate and lineal successor of the old Slaughter's Coffee-house in St. Martin's-lane, of whose ancient waiter and young military frequenters Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* discourses delightfully. Gamridge's, in 1836, was at the apogee of its popularity and renown; but, a few years afterwards—such is the mutability of human affairs—Gamridge's was destined to be eclipsed by the Rag and Famish.

Why "Rag" and why "Famish"? I, as a poor slouching civilian, am not, I hope, bound to know. The Rag and Famish seems to me a most palatial edifice, superb in all its exterior appointments. I have heard that its inner chambers are decorated in the most lavish style of Oriental splendour; that its smoking-room vies in gorgeousness with the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra; that, in its drawing-rooms, the genius of the most eminent upholsterers in London has run riot. Nobody can be in rags, nobody can possibly be famished at the R. and F. The cuisine, I have heard, is exquisite, the wines and liquors are beyond compare. The lightest-vested and brightest-buttoned foot-pages in the parish of St. James's gambol and grin behind the plate-glass doors. The most majestic and the longest-moustached military bricks puff their cigars on the steps. There are always half a dozen Hansoms in waiting before the portal. On the Derby Day, drags by the score start from the Rag. The prizes in the race sweeps at the Rag are said to be enormous.

Let me see, what is the pay of a subaltern in the Line? Some seventy or eighty pounds a year, I believe. What is the half-pay of a general officer?

Not many hundreds per annum, I am afraid. It strikes me that the establishment, not only of the Rag, but of the Senior and Junior United Service Clubs, must have been an inestimable boon to the young warriors who are ready to fight their country's battles, and to the old braves who have fought them, and retired to grass, and whose helmets are now hives for bees. To live like a fighting-cock, and to be housed like a prince ; to have all the newspapers and periodicals, and a first-rate library ; billiard and smoking-rooms, baths and lavatories, lounging and elbow-resting room ; a numerous staff of silent, civil, and deferential servants in imposing liveries, and as much stationery as ever you want ; these are joys familiar to the members of the Rag, and of other cognate mansions. The young fellow on active service can run up from Chatham or Aldershot, and have the free range of a Venetian palace till his leave is out. The battered half-pay has but to provide himself with a bedroom at half a guinea a week in Jermyn-street, or St. Alban's-place, and, from nine of the clock on one morning till two or three of the clock on the next, he may live as luxuriously as a Sultan of Cathay. The annual subscription is moderate. The table-money is in-

considerable. Beer, bread, and pickles, are dispensed gratuitously. The cigars are foreign. The provisions and wines are supplied at rates very little exceeding cost price.

Whereas, I can't see what a civilian wants with a club at all. He has a home, which the soldier and sailor, as a rule, have not. He has a cook at home. He may refeit himself in a decorous dining-room at home. If he wants books, let him subscribe to the London Library, or ask Mr. Panizzi for a ticket for the Museum Reading-room. He needs no smoking-room. Civilians have no right to smoke. He needs no billiard-room. Civilians should be men of business, and men of business have no right to play billiards. "Clubs," says Solomon Buck, in one of his wisest apophthegms, "are weapons of offence, wielded by savages for the purpose of keeping off the white women." S. B. is right. Clubs, for your dashing, rollicking, harum-scarum soldiers and sailors, are all very well. The gallant fellows need a little relaxation after the irksome restraints of barracks or ship-board; but clubs, to the unworthy civilian class, are merely the meanest pretexts for selfishness and self-indulgence.

Having, I flatter myself, in the preceding para-

graph, set myself right with the ladies (whom I am always trying to conciliate, and always unsuccessfully), I will proceed to the consideration of Gamridge's. Social clubs of the palatial order were rare in 1836. St. James's had its exclusive political reunions—White's, Brooks's, Boodle's, and the like; but none save the elect of the elect could obtain admission to them. Crockford's was very fashionable, but it was a gaming-house. The Carlton wasn't built. The Athenæum and the Reform were arrogant with the flush of the March of Intellect, and looked down upon the men of the sword. The members of the now defunct Alfred were quarrelling among themselves. The United Service only admitted officers of high grade. What remained, then, for the young or middle-aged warriors but Gamridge's?

Gamridge's was not a club; its coffee-room was open to all comers; yet the character of its frequenters was so strongly marked, that an outsider rarely, if ever, ventured to set foot within the mysterious precincts. A bagman who presumed to enter Gamridge's would have had a bad time of it. There would have been wailing in Lancashire, if a Manchester man had so far forgotten himself

as to intrude, uninvited, on the Gamridgean exclusiveness. In its distinctive typification, and its invisible but impassable barriers, Gamridge's resembled one of the old coffee-houses of the preceding century. They, too, were open to all; yet you seldom found any but merchants at Garraway's or Jonathan's, soldiers at the Crown in Whitehall, gamesters at Sam's in St. James's-street, country squires at the Star and Garter in Pall-Mall, Jacobites at the Harp at Cornhill, booksellers' hacks at the Devil in Fleet-street, lawyers at the Cock, and publishers at the Ball in Long-acre.

There had never, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the parish, been a Gamridge. Who he was, if ever he were at all, there is no knowing. In '36 the landlord—landlady, rather—was Mrs. Vash: a handsome portly widow, who wore bishop's sleeves, and a multitude of ribbons in her cap. She had many daughters, whom she kept scrupulously at boarding-school to preserve them from the perils of Gamridge's; for, if the "wild prince" was dead, "Poins" was about, wilder than ever. Mrs. Vash was a woman of the world. A few, a very few, of her oldest customers—old gentlemen who had been so long and so consistently raking about town that

they seemed, on the principle of extremes meeting, almost steady—were sometimes admitted to the luxurious privacy of Mrs. Vash's bar-parlour. She was an excellent judge of port wine, and, being a generous hostess, would occasionally treat some of her prime favourites to a bottle with a peculiar tawny seal. In the coffee-room Mrs. Vash tolerated cigars, and carefully charged ninepence apiece for them. She was equally careful to charge exorbitant prices for every article consumed. You might give a dinner now-a-days at the Rag, for what a breakfast cost at Gamridge's.

The politics of Gamridge's were High Tory in tone. The true blue patrician class had lost much power and influence by Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill, and threw themselves for a change into dissipation. Liberal Conservatives had not yet perked up into existence. Among the Whigs and Radicals it was held to be the orthodox thing, just then, to be steady and sober, to bring in moral acts of parliament, to attend lectures at the Royal Institution. The Tories sneered contemptuously at education and morality. They were staunch churchmen, but in the "flying buttress" sense, like Lord Eldon, supporting the sacred edifice from the out-

side. They called the London University "Stink-omalee," or the "Gower-street Pig and Whistle." They held schools where the birch was not in daily use, as the vilest hotbeds of sedition, and were careful to send their children to seminaries where they knew they would have plenty of flogging in the good old Tory style. The society at Gambridge's was a permanent protest against the Penny Magazine, and the steam-engine, and the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, and the educational whimsies of your Broughams, Bentham's, Faradays, De Morgans, and compeers. Nothing useful, save eating and drinking, was ever attempted at Gambridge's; and even those elementary functions were performed in the manner most calculated to confer the least amount of benefit on the human frame. The guests breakfasted at three in the afternoon, and dined at midnight. Gas blazed in the coffee-room at noon, and knocked-up roués went to bed at tea-time. There were many white-faced waiters who never seemed to go to bed at all, and to like this perpetual insomnolence. Pale ale was unknown in England then, but the popping of corks from bottles of mineral waters was audible all day long. Dice, only, Mrs. Vash rigidly refused to

wink at. "If gentlemen, who were gentlemen," she remarked, "wanted to call a main, they must do it in the parish of St. James's, and not in the parish of St. George's." Mrs. Vash was one of the old school, and liked to see things done in their proper places.

It was a vicious time, and yet somewhat of the patriarchal element remained. Plebeian dissipation was confined to the youngsters. The old gentlemen went to the Deuce, mounted on steady ambling cobs. A new race of rakes drove them gradually from the coffee-room at Gamridge's, and Mrs. Vash's back parlour, where they piped disparagement of the rapsallion age over their port with the tawny seal. Thence by slow degrees they subsided into Pump-street, and to Bath, and Cheltenham, and Fogeydom, and went home to bed, and fell paralytic, and so died.

Mr. Francis Blunt walked into Gamridge's at about a quarter to one in the morning, with a light tight-fitting overcoat buttoned over him, swinging his cane, and looking, on the whole, "as fresh as paint." The coarseness of the simile may find an excuse in its literal fidelity. A fresh pair of lemon-coloured kid gloves decorated his hands, the many

rings bulging from beneath the soft leather. His whiskers had been rearranged—perhaps those ornaments and his hair were not strangers to a recent touch from the curling-irons, for there were hair-dressers in the Quadrant who kept open till past midnight for the behoof of exquisites such as he—his clothes had been brushed, his whole exterior spruced and polished up. He had passed a hard day, but he was ready to begin a night as hard.

There was nothing particular about the exterior of Gamridge's. It was a George-the-Second mansion of sad-coloured brick with stone dressings, and the lamp before the door was generally in a state of compound fracture from the exuberant playfulness of late-returning guests. "Lamp-glass broken, one pound five," was a common item in Mrs. Vash's long bills. When the late-returning lodgers didn't smash the lamp, they smashed the fanlight, or the soda-water tumblers, or the coffee-room panels, or the waiters' heads. They were always breaking something, and everything was charged in the bill. You entered Gamridge's by a long, low, oblique passage, seemingly specially designed for the benefit of gentlemen who came home late, overtaken with liquor, and swerved in their gait. They could not

well tumble down in their progress along that sporting passage. The coffee-room was almost devoid of decoration. Had it been papered, the gentlemen would have torn the paper off; had there been a pier-glass, somebody would have smashed it, but, as pier-glasses then cost twenty pounds, the item might have been subject to inconvenient dispute in the bill. So, to be on the safe side, Mrs. Vash provided her guests with a thick circular mirror in a nubbly frame, which defied even a poker. En revanche, the gallant youths who frequented the coffee-room had scratched their names on it, as well as on the window-panes, in a hundred places, with their diamond rings.

There was an immense dumb-waiter. The tables were of mahogany, brightly polished; wax candlesticks, in silver sconces, were always used, to the disdainful exclusion of gas—and with one of those same candlesticks many a tall fellow had been laid low—but the floor was sanded, and triangular spittoons were dispersed about. It was the oddest combination of luxury and coarseness, of a club-room and a pot-house.

In this room, a dozen of the greatest dandies in England were assembled. Some had fifty thousand

a year, and some had nothing, and owed thrice fifty thousand pounds; but, poor or rich, all were fashionable. It was a congregation of prodigal sons and prodigal fathers, but fathers and sons were both accustomed to sit in the high places, and to have room made for them.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT GAMBRIDGE'S.

IT was very late, or rather very early, and Gambridge's was in full conclave. There was laughing, and there was swearing; bets were laid, and taken, and booked; stories were told; and jokes were created; and scandals were, not covertly buzzed, but openly roared about. There was much sincerity at Gambridge's, towards two in the morning. A few of the dandies were drunk, and their candour was, consequently, comprehensible; but others, older and more seasoned vessels, were quite as sincere, being simply cynical. They did not, perhaps, wear their hearts upon their sleeves, the majority of the possible wearers not

being troubled with centres of vitality; but they wore, instead, an impudent glorying in unholy lives, an insolent contempt for all that was good or pure—or stupid—which was the Gamridgean synonyme for goodness and purity; a bold, defiant, almost chivalrous, and completely diabolical pride—pride of birth, pride of rank, pride of person, pride of dress, pride of intellect (there were some fools there, certainly, and they were proud of their folly, and plumed themselves upon their drawl or their lisp), pride, in fine, of the power of doing evil, and of impunity in wrongdoing. When a very vicious man has very good health, he becomes, indeed, the roaring lion, raging up and down, and seeking whom he may devour. It is only when his constitution is impaired, and his limbs grow shaky, that he begins to crawl in the dust, like a serpent, and wind his body round trees, and whisper counsels full of perdition to the silly.

So, most present spoke their minds at Gamridge's. There was no concealment. Everybody was as bad as his neighbour. At two o'clock in the morning there was no need for concealment. In the daytime, at the clubs, at Chiswick, in the

parks, at the theatres, you saw the beautiful Gobelins tapestry, marvellous in the minute finish of its work, suffused with glowing yet tender tints. But at two o'clock in the morning, at Gamridge's, the tapestry was turned up and pinned against the wall. You saw the reverse of the picture—you saw what was behind the exquisite work and the glowing tints. A lamentable arras, indeed: full of knots, and loops, and cobbles, and darns, and frayed ends of dirty worsted protruding from a coarse canvas ground.

A roar of acclaim broke forth as Blunt entered the room. He was a great favourite among the dandies. The famous marquis of those days thrust forward his shoulder-of-mutton palm and squeezed Blunt's delicate hand. Francis Blunt, Esquire, was, perhaps, the only frequenter of Gamridge's who kept his mask on at two o'clock in the morning.

The dandies crowded round him, for he had a renown for saying things which, if not brilliantly clever, were at least spiteful, and consequently amusing. But Mr. Blunt was, this morning, in no mood for venting epigrams or retailing scandalous anecdotes. He could ill conceal his pre-occupation.

"Is Debonnair here?" he asked.

"Been here these two hours," answered the colleague he addressed, Captain Langhorne, of the Guards. "Been drinking oceans of soda-and-B., and getting very spooney. Mounthawkington says he's in love. I say it's lush."

In the reign of King William the Fourth the aristocracy were not ashamed to use habitually the language of costermongers. In these days, the writer believes, the superior orders never soil their lips with slang terms.

"Will he play?" Blunt whispered to the Guardsman.

"Whom d'ye mean? Mounthawkington?"

"He play? A hurdy-gurdy, perhaps. I don't mean him. He's not worth playing beggar-my-neighbour with; for my neighbour, Mounthawkington, is beggared already. I mean Debonnair."

"I tell you he's spooney. He'd do anything you told him to do. He is the soft and verdant spinach, and sighs for the due accompaniment of gammon. If you stretched a tight rope across the room he'd dance upon it like Madame Saqui—till he tumbled off tipsy. He's game to play anything, from blind hookey up to chicken hazard. He's very spooney, and decidedly sprung."

“Will you see that he doesn’t drink too much? Keep him off champagne. It’ll drive him mad. Keep him on his soda-and-B. That won’t do him any harm.”

“Do you want him, then, that you’re so very anxious about his precious health?”

“My dear fellow, I want him between this and five in the morning, for as much as ready money and I.O.U.s payable within four-and-twenty hours, will give me.”

The Guardsman whistled. “You’ve been hit rather hard, Blunt, lately,” he remarked, “and you want your innings, I suppose? Well, Debonnair is as good as another, I suppose. Only don’t knock him down as though you were pitching at the pins in a skittle alley. Let him down softly, poor lad. Let him fall on a feather-bed.”

“Have you so much sympathy for him?”

“Well, he’s only a boy, you know. It’s a pity to knock him down all at once, because—because, you know, he’s young, and there’s a good deal more plucking about him—and if you skin him alive all at once, he might get sick of the thing, and turn steady.”

“I see. Well, you shall have him when I’ve

done with him. There'll be plenty of pickings left, I'll promise you."

"Dence doubt you. Do you want any fellow to-night in with you?"

"Thanks, not one. Lord Henry Debonnair and self; that's all."

"And old Nick as double dummy. Well, I've no wish to spoil sport. Good digestion wait on appetite, and luck on both, and a pot full of ready on all three. What do you go in for? The bones?"

"No; not for serious business. We must, for form's sake, have an hour at Crockey's, but the real affair must come off at the count's. I want him at King John, in a side-room, while the rest of you fellows are deep at hazard. Debonnair, how are you, old fellow?"

All this, save the concluding salutation, had been uttered in the discreetest whisper; but, "Debonnair, how are you, old fellow?" was voiced in the bland and cheery tone of which Francis Blunt, Esquire, was an admirable master.

"The Griffin means mischief to-night," Mr. Langhorne, of the Guards, cursorily remarked a few moments afterwards to Lord Claude Mount-hawkington.

“Oh! confound him,” replied the dandy addressed, who was a younger son of a poor nobleman, and had been ruined too early: “he always does mean mischief after midnight. He has had me many a time, and for many a thousand. How in the world does he manage it? He plays on the square, I s’pose?”

“On the squarest of squares. A perfect cube. He’s the soul of honour, my dear fellow. I’m peckish, and want some oysters and stout.” And Mr. Langhorne, of the Guards, passed on.

“Debonnair, old fellow, how are you?”

Lord Henry Debonnair liked to be called “old fellow.” He was very young. He was a boy. He had a fair round smooth face, quite innocent and blooming. His russet hair curled about an unfurrowed brow. His blue eyes were cloudless. His pretty lips seemed quite untainted by contact with pollution. How should they be? If the inclinations of his secret soul had been laid bare, the discovery that he was still fond of lollipops, and never passed an apple-stall without longing to pilfer a couple of the rosy-cheeked fruit of the dozing Irishwoman to whom they belonged, might have been made. He smoked, and the act of

fumigation made him very sick ; but he continued to smoke, almost without intermission, because the other fellows did it, and it was the thing.

It was likewise the thing, in those days, to drink ; so Lord Henry Debonnair drank—champagne, Moselle, Tokay, soda-and-B., and not unfrequently the fortifying but stupifying dog's-nose with the friendly cabman, or the enlivening but poisonous Geneva with the convivial gladiator, or affable hanger-on of the prize-ring. It was the thing in the reign of King William the Fourth, to associate with cabmen and pugilists. As Lord Henry's little head was very weak, intoxication, in its most demonstrative form, was of by no means rare occurrence with him ; and he had been at least half a dozen times locked up in various metropolitan station-houses, and the next morning fined five shillings. It was the thing to be locked up at night, and banter the police magistrate in the morning.

He had always—from reason's first dawn at least—experienced considerable difficulty in settling, to his own satisfaction, that two and two made four. But he kept a voluminous betting-book, and backed the favourite, or laid against the field, for all sorts

of events, double and single, to the extent of some thousands of pounds yearly. He betted, as he gambled, as he drank, as he did worse, as he went to prize-fights and cock-fights and ratting matches, as he drove a four-in-hand (he who was hardly out of a go-cart), as he kept race-horses and bulldogs: not because he cared much about those amusements, or those luxuries—for next to lollipops his most pronounced taste was for boiled mutton and turnips, suet-pudding, and ginger-beer—but because it was the “thing” among the “set” to which he belonged. He was very lazy, very thoughtless, and very profligate, because it was the thing to be so, and he had never done, and never intended, any harm to any living creature. Lord Henry Debonnair belonged to a class common enough in the reign of William the Fourth, but whose type in the reign of Queen Victoria is extinct.

Francis Blunt, Esquire, had twisted this young nobleman round his finger. He had passed a silken string through his nose, and led him by it, with perfect ease and comfort to both parties. He was far too clever to toady the young lord. He patronised him. Lord Henry looked up to

him, with implicit trust and confidence, as guide, philosopher, and friend. He recognised all the attraction of Griffin Blunt's brilliant depravity. He felt, in his boyish mind, proud to know so experienced a profligate, so cultivated a master of nefarious arts. It was the respect a youngster at school pays to an oldster. Blunt was too wary to borrow ready money of his protégé. It was not the thing to be in need of a five-pound note. But Blunt obtained the noble name of Debonnair as acceptor, as endorser, or as drawer, to innumerable bills of exchange at all kinds of dates. His lordship was never troubled to part with ready cash when the bills came due. He had only to sign his noble name once more, and so, the interest was paid, the bills were renewed, and Francis Blunt, Esquire, was flush of cash, and would be able even to give Jean Baptiste Constant a trifle on account of his wages. Oh, the wonderful power of paper-money, and how wide-spreading are the wings of Icarus until the wax melts off. Then he comes down plump; as Law did; as Turgot did; as the latest edition of Chevy CHASE will do.

Frank Blunt drew his arm through that of Lord Henry, and soothed, and flattered, and told gay

stories to the noble boy he meant to cheat before sunrise, and whose brains he would have been, under any circumstances, glad enough to blow out : believing, as he did, that Debonnair admired his wife too much. Poor boy ! Has there not been seen, ere now, a little spaniel puppy dog frisking about in the den of a Bengal tigress ? Blunt allowed no trace either of his design or of his resentment to show itself. He was a diplomatic villain, not a melodramatic one. Plunder your enemy first, and murder him afterwards, if there be occasion for it : so ran the cautious current of Francis Blunt, Esquire's, reasoning.

As fate would have it, he was destined, that night or morning, neither to rob nor to kill Lord Henry Debonnair. For, just as the boy and he had quitted Gamridge's hospitable roof, and were mounting the former's cabriolet, en route for Crockey's, two men of mildewed, slightly greasy, decidedly shabby, and unmistakably Jewish, mien, made their appearance in the lamplight, one on either side of the aforesaid cabriolet. A third man, who was older, and shabbier, and greasier, and more mildewed, but not Jewish, appeared, with pantomimic suddenness, at the horse's head.

“Good Heavens, Blunt, what is the meaning of this?” cried Lord Henry.

“It only means,” replied the dandy, with well-assumed coolness, but with a very pale face, “that I am taken in execution—arrested, as it is called—for three thousand five hundred pounds, and that, instead of going in your cab to Crockford’s, I must take a hackney-coach, with these respected gentlemen, to Chancery-lane.”

CHAPTER XV.

GETTING UP.

THE morning broke very sadly and drearily to the little child, left, quite alone, at Rhododendron House. The servant-maid, with whom she had been put to sleep, had risen at six o'clock, for her work was of the hardest, and her pabulum of rest infinitesimal. So, when, about half an hour afterwards, the bold sun came hammering through Lily's eyelids, preaching, to old and young alike, that eternal sermon against Sloth, the girl's place beside her being yet warm, but deserted, it is not, I hope, to be taken as a very wonderful event, if Lily began immediately to cry. It does not take much to bring tears from the eyes of a little child.

The infant weeps instead of cogitating; and the result arrived at is about as logical in the one case as in the other. Lily's dolour was as yet of no very outrageous kind. It was less a fractious roar than a meek wail of expostulation. Her sorrows dawned with the day: the noontide of misery was to come. She had but a very faint idea of where she was, and a fainter still of how she had come there. Everything was strange to her. Her memory was naturally short. The events of the previous day had been rapid, crowded, and unusual. The upshot was hopeless confusion. So she betook herself to tears. The sun, however, after vindicating his dignity and potency before stirring her up so rudely, seemed to relent. He condescended to console her. He was a generous giant after all, and acknowledged that so tiny a lie-a-bed might urge some plea in abatement of his wrath. There was time—hard and cruel time enough—for Lily to acquire habits of early rising. So, murmuring (if the Sun indeed can sing) that beautiful burden to the old nurse's ballad,

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,
When thou art old there's quite enough for thee,

he, too, began to smile on Lily, and to show her

wonderful things. He had a plenteous store, and a rich, and a brave; and the child smiled in his company. The sun's beams dried her eyes. She looked, and saw the motes dancing in the golden rays; the strip of drugget tessellated in a bright pattern, the knobs on the chest of drawers gleaming in the shine. Then, outside, some creeping green plants, stirred by the morning breeze, chose, with a merry furtiveness, to peep in upon her through the panes; and the sun turned them to all kinds of colours. Her mind was yet as light as a leaf; volatile, and carried hither and thither as the wind listed. She laughed, and forgot her little woe, and found herself playing with the pillow, which, to her, speedily became animate, and a thing to be fondled, dandled, chidden, and apostrophised. It is the privilege of very little girls to be able to turn anything into a puppet; as it is of very little boys to make anything into soldiers. I once knew the small daughter, aged three, of a tinker, who nursed, for a whole hour, a dead rat for a doll.

As nobody came, however, and the painful fact of the pillow having no legs, became apparent, and the sun went in (to cast up his yesterday's

accounts, may be), after showing, for a moment, his jolly red face at the door of his dwelling, gloom came again to overshadow Lily's soul. The petty horizon was very soon darkened, and the rain-drops began once more to patter. She felt very lonely, very friendless, very hungry; and though the sun, in his back parlour, hearing her sobbing, looked up from his ledger, and opening a casement drove a lively beam across her bed, she was inconsolable, now, and wept with unassuageable bitterness.

All at once there came a dreadful bell. It must have been made of Chinese gongs, melted down with revolutionary tocsins, fire-alarums, jarring chimes from brick chapels in grim towns of the shoddy country, peals from jails and workhouses, bells from men-o'-war where discipline was rigid, and whose captains were Tartars: the whole hung in the Tower of Babel, furnished with a clapper forged from Xantippe's tongue, and finally cracked and flawed under the especial auspices of Mr. Denison, Q.C. It was a most appalling bell. It elected, first, to creak and groan, and then to emit a frightful rasping clangour that set your teeth on edge, and made your bosom's lord sit so uneasily on his throne as to seem in danger of tumbling off.

You could hear the duller sound of the tugging at the rope, and the thud of the outer rim of the bell against the brick wall by the side of which it was hung, besides the persistent bang, bang, banging of the clapper itself. It was a campanile of evil omen, a sound of doom, a most abominable bell—the school-bell of Rhododendron House.

The five-and-thirty boarders in Rhododendron House knew well enough, from long and sad experience, what the bell meant. It signified Get up! Get up this minute! Get up this instant! Get up, you lazy little minxes, under pain of ever so many bad marks, extra lessons, and diminished rations of bread-and-butter! So, sluggishly or speedily, but still inevitably, the pupils proceeded to rise, to dress, and to lave themselves. All of these processes were ill done; and at prayer-time, few of the five-and-thirty were more than half-dressed, half-washed, or half-awake. But they were all there.

To poor little Lily the bell represented only so much deafening noise, mingled with some vague and indefinite menace of she knew not what. It made her cry more than aught else that had previously excited her emotion; and if, at the end of

five minutes, or thereabouts, the horrible instrument had not surceased in its uproar, it is not at all out of the range of probability that the terrified child might have screamed herself into a fit.

“Hoity-toity!” quoth Miss Barbara Bunycastle, entering the room at this juncture, “what’s all this noise about? No crying allowed here, Miss Floris. You should have been up and dressed half an hour ago, little one.”

She was quite another Miss Barbara Bunycastle to the young lady who had received Lily the night before. Her voice was sharper, her gait firmer, her manner more determined. She seemed to forget that there were any such persons as parents, and spoke only to pupils. Cake and wine existed no more in her allure; she was suggestive only of bread and scrape and sky-blue. The holidays were a million miles, and ten centuries, away. She was not cruel, only cross; not severe, only strict. She was still the guide, philosopher, and friend of her young charges; but she was, above all, their governess.

Miss Barbara had at first some difficulty in reconciling herself to the gross infraction of scholastic

discipline committed by a young lady-boarder, who had not only neglected to leave her couch at the first sound of the "getting-up bell," and apparel herself in her every-day garments, but was also so ignorant of the arts of the toilette as to be behind-hand in reaching the dingy corridor, dignified with the name of a lavatory, where the five-and-thirty matutinally fought for the possession of two jack-towels and three squares of yellow soap. Miss Floris was not even competent to hook-and-eye another young lady's frock, or entreat her, in return, to tie her pinafore. What was to be done with a pupil who could not even part her hair, and knew nothing of the proper maintenance of a comb-bag? But, by degrees, it dawned on Miss Barbara that Lily Floris was a very little, little child—a mere baby, in fact—and that there was plenty of time to break her into the manège pursued at the Stockwell academy of female equitation. Even the education of Adelaide and Theodora, those paragons of judicious training, must have had a beginning. Next, it occurred to Miss Barbara that the little one represented so much good money, already paid in her behalf, and that she might be made to represent much more, equally good. Ac-

cordingly, bowing to the force of circumstances, she shrugged the shoulders of her mind, and concluded that the affair, although dreadfully irregular, must be made the best of; and, in pursuance of this sage resolve, she condescended to order up Miss Floris's trunk, and to array the new inmate in the garments provided for her. Nay, she even went so far as to take soap and towel in hand, and to frictionise and slouch, in alternate douches and dry rubs, the face and hands of her protégée.

Lily felt more alone than ever. She missed the warm bath, the soft sponge, the soothing words and merry tales, with which her old nurse used to make the ordeal of the tub tolerable. Now, the tub was replaced by the servant-girl's wash-hand basin, a fictile bowl of many cracks, not much bigger than a pie-dish. She was dreadfully afraid—she knew not why—of her instructress; but she could not subdue a stifled sobbing. When, added to anguish of mind, you happen to have some soap in your eyes, it is hard to refrain from lamentation.

Miss Barbara observed the child's grief, and, as she washed her, chid her.

"You mustn't cry," she said, sharply. "It's

wrong, and foolish ; and, besides, it'll prevent your learning your lessons. Do you know what it is to learn lessons ? ”

“ Ess,” replied Lily, who had once or twice essayed to put a doll through a course of elementary instruction, but, for the rest, had no more idea of lessons than of the Teeloogoo language.

“ That's right,” quoth Barbara. “ You'll have plenty to learn while you're here, I can tell you. Idleness is the parent of vice ; and you'd better be dead than a dunce. Above all, no crying—it's wicked. Do you understand me ? ”

“ Ess,” replied Lily again, feeling that she was called upon to say something, but understanding about as much of the drift of the query as of the primordial organisation of matter.

“ Then, dry your eyes directly. You mustn't look as if you were unhappy. Nobody is allowed to be unhappy here. You're to be brought up under the law of kindness. I've washed and dressed you this morning, and, till you're able to do it yourself, the servant will see after you. I'm not a nurserymaid, understand that. Now, come along.”

“ Ess,” replied Lily again, bewildered between

the exposition of the law of kindness, and the soap still smarting in the aqueous humours of her eyes.

“Then, why don’t you do as you are bidden?” pursued Miss Barbara, giving a very slight stamp with her foot.

Somehow, Lily couldn’t do as she was bidden. She was not naturally rebellious—only dismayed. But, in her helplessness, and with this terrible personage who spoke so sharply and scrubbed so hard, hovering over her, an indefinable feeling of insubordination took possession of her small frame. She was a very tiny leveret to stand at bay; but she clenched her fists, and crammed them into her eyes, and, stammering out, “I won’t,” sat down in the middle of the drugget; and the rest was inarticulate moaning.

Here was a fine piece of work! The logical Miss Barbara felt that it would be a lamentable dereliction of the law of kindness to have recourse to slapping; on the other hand, the child only responded to commands by more passionate outcries. So Miss Barbara took a middle course, and, seizing the recalcitrant by one arm, shook her.

“Will you come now, you aggravating little thing?” she exclaimed.

The shaking was slight enough; but it was quite sufficient to subdue the aggravating little thing—she, who up to that moment, had never had a finger laid upon her in anger. Miss Barbara had not clutched her with any extraordinary vigour; but she was muscular, and her fingers had left faint red streaks on Lily's baby-flesh. The child looked at these marks, and acknowledged at once the presence of superior will, of irresistible force. An extinguisher descended quickly, and for good, on the flickering flame of revolt. She gave in—rose—suffered Miss Barbara to rearrange her rumpled frock—and very meekly followed her down stairs, clinging to the bombazine skirt of her instructress.

Miss Barbara Bunycastle had, probably, never perused the famous work on Education written by Mr. John Locke, author of an Essay on the Conduct of the Human Understanding, in which that profound philosopher relates a light-hearted anecdote of a lady—a most affable maternal person, and an ornament to her sex, I am sure—who whipped her little daughter on her coming home from nurse, eight times in succession, in the course of one morning, before she could subdue her obsti-

nacy. "And, had she stopped at the seventh whipping," opines the grave Mr. Locke, "the child would have been ruined." Fortunately, Lily's little outbreak had been got under by the first overt act of coercion. I am not prepared to surmise what the result might have been after eight shakings.

So, down they went, passing through the lavatory before mentioned, when two or three lagging boarders, who had been late in obtaining a hold on the jack-towels and the yellow soap, or were still dallying with the comb-bag, or vainly endeavouring to find eyes for their hooks, fled, half unkempt, before Miss Bunycastle's face, like chaff before the wind. Then they descended half a dozen break-neck stairs, and leaving a lobby, hung with bags, and cloaks, and playground hats and bonnets, behind them, entered a long low whitewashed room, barely furnished with desks painted black, and wooden forms, and a few maps, and a closed book-case strongly resembling a meat-screen, and at the upper end of which, at a raised rostrum, sat Mrs. Bunycastle, with a pile of open volumes before her. She was supported on either side, like her Majesty in the House of Lords, by lower chairs of estate, occupied by Miss Celia and Miss Adelaide

Bunnycastle. The English and the French governesses, or "teachers," as they were less reverently called by the pupils, occupied desks at the further end of the schoolroom, and Miss Barbara had a kind of roving commission all over the academic premises, to inspect, to watch, to report, and to reprove. Her eye was everywhere, and her body was in most places.

It would seem that, on this particular morning, the whole pomp and state of the establishment of Rhododendron House had been brought out to impress the new pupil—though she was such a little one—with a due sense of awe and reverence. It was rarely, under ordinary circumstances, that Mrs. Bunnycastle made her appearance in the schoolroom until after breakfast; and as seldom did more than two of the sisters deign to attend the earliest assembly of the pupils. However, on the first appearance of Lily in the schoolroom, she found herself face to face with the whole dread hierarchy of her future home—to say nothing of the five-and-thirty boarders sitting at their desks, whose gaze appeared to be directed towards Miss Floris with the concentrated force of one eye.

"Don't stare about you so," whispered Miss

Barbara to Lily; she had to stoop a long way down to whisper. "Little girls shouldn't stare. It's an idle wicked habit. Now, kneel down, and be very quiet."

Happily, Lily needed but slender instruction in this last particular. She had been taught to pray. She plumped down on her little knees, and, folding her hands with edifying decorum, bent her fair head, and began to murmur God knows what. Emphatically, *HE* knew what.

There was a shuffling, rustling noise as the girls, at a signal, rose from their desks to kneel upon the forms. Then Mrs. Bunycastle read prayers in a mild bleating voice, taking care to pronounce "knowledge" with an omega. After the orthodox orisons, she read a lengthy homily from a thin dog's-eared book, which, according to a tradition among the girls, had been written by a dean, who was Mrs. Bunycastle's grandpapa. The homily was full of very hard words, and, consequently, most wholesome and improving; but its arguments seemed to have a directer reference to some by-gone theological controversies than to the immediate spiritual wants of the five-and-thirty boarders. However, there was a beautiful passage about the

idolatries of Rome—which Mrs. Bunycastle, according to diaconal precedent, scrupulously pronounced Room—and the homily was accompanied by at least one gratifying circumstance, that everybody seemed very glad when it was over. The girls, who had joined in the responses to the prayers with great zeal and apparent zest, and in divers degrees of shrillness, now rustled and shuffled into their places again, and Mrs. Bunycastle proceeded to promulgate divers bills of pains and penalties, in the shape of lessons and bad marks for offences committed between the setting of the sun on the previous evening, and the rising of the same that morning; and then, when one young lady had broken into a dismal howl at being condemned to learn by heart a whole page of *Télémaque*, and another had been relegated to the penal study of a cheerful genealogy in *Genesis*, and a third had seen the prospect of the after-dinner play-hour dashed from her lips by the stern behest to copy out thrice the verb *Se Désobéir*, and when all the inculcated young ladies had vehemently denied the sins of omission and commission imputed to them, and when the governesses appealed to had emitted lava floods of crimination

and recrimination, and when Mrs. Bunycastle had rapped her desk several times in a minatory manner, with the dean's volume of homilies, and somebody's ears had been boxed—for the law of kindness did not exclude some occasional commentaries and marginal references of a sterner character—the cook of Rhododendron House who, to all appearance, had been lying in wait below till the climax of shrill outcry and uproar should be reached, suddenly burst upon the assembly, not in person, but vicariously, by ringing the bell for breakfast. A very hot person was the cook. She would bend over her saucepans in the kitchen till she attained, as it seemed, a red heat, and would then rush up stairs into the playground, and tug at the bell till she was cool: thus triumphantly vindicating the principle of counter-irritation.

CHAPTER XVI.

LILY BEGINS TO LEARN THINGS.

RHODODENDRON HOUSE was to Lily a mysterious monster, a dragon that devoured children. After the first "getting-up bell," the first prayer-meeting, and the first school-breakfast, he gobbled her up; and she, a very small Jonah indeed, became absorbed in him, and dwelt in his immensity. Of the great boiling, turbid sea of the external world she could know nothing—the dragon's jaws formed the entrance to the school, and were garnished with many fangs. So she abode within, and at first trembled, but gradually grew accustomed to the arched-inwards, and ribbed sides, and vast viscera of the monster; and, as it was her

nature to love things when she became accustomed to them, the school dragon lost, at last, all his terrors for the child, and Lily became that exceeding rarity, a little girl who was fond of her school.

Quite alone, she had nothing else in the world to be fond of. The people who had brought her to school had forgotten to put any toys among her needments. Her exquisite papa had, probably, never heard of such vulgar frivolities, and Jean Baptiste Constant had, perhaps, matters more important to think of at the moment. Lily had not so much as a doll. The rough old playthings she used to potter about with in the plasterer's house soon faded into the nothingness of oblivion. So, too, did the plasterer himself, and his wife her old nurse, and their little boy her foster-brother. First, she forgot their names, and only bore them in mind as the good people far away, who used to be fond of her, and romp with her, and bear with her little tempers. Then, the plasterer's face and form began to be a matter of doubt, and she could not tell whether he had red hair or black hair—whether he wore a beard, or whiskers, or both, or neither. Curiously, she remembered latest, his strong ribbed

corduroy trousers—probably because she had careered on them so many times cockhorse to Coventry, and she connected with these garments the strong acrid fumes of the tobacco he smoked. Blue vapour, hot and pungent, was always curling from that excellent man; without his pipe, Lily would have lost her last definite conception of her foster-father. But the pipe went out at last, and the smoke mingled with the clouds, and drifted away into space. The boy, her playmate, she forgot in one sudden landslip of recollection. He was there, for a moment, with a rough head she used to touzle, a top he used to spin for her amusement, a back that was always at her service. He was her horse, her dog, her coach, her ship, her steam-engine, but all at once his fastenings loosened, and he tumbled down into the gulf for ever. And then, last of all, poor nurse went. Lily clung to her image as long as ever she could, and struggled hard to retain it, but the inevitable law asserted it, and nurse melted away. She came to have two faces, like Janus, and then none at all. Her hands and feet disappeared in a wreath of filmy imaginations. Long after that, her checked apron remained—the apron on which Lily used to

sit before the fire, warm and dry and glowing from her bath, purring like a kitten—the apron which had strings to be pulled, and twisted, and untied by her uncertain little fingers, to the great discomfort, but never-failing delight of the good woman—the apron to whose corner Lily used to cling in her first venturesome excursions into the back garden. But the apron was doomed. The records of that court of exchequer crumbled into decay, and away went nurse, apron, and all, not to be remembered again on this side death, when—oh! joy for some, and woe unutterable for others—we shall remember everything.

This last holdfast being taken away, what remained? Rhododendron House, and nothing more. The apparition of the two strange men who had brought her by night to school had scarcely ruffled the surface of the lake, had scarcely breathed upon the mirror. They could scarcely have been forgotten, for they had never been remembered. When the Miss Bunnycastle spoke to Lily about her papa, and told her that he was a perfect gentleman, and brought a man-servant with him who was almost as grand a gentleman as he, she could respond only by a vacant stare. She knew no

papa. Little by little, there came over her a vague consciousness that she ought properly to have one, for most of the young ladies were continually vaunting their possession of such a parent; and when she was about six, she toddled up one day to Mr. Drax, when he was paying one of his periodical visits, and with a very grave and knowledge-seeking visage, asked him this alarming question: "Missa Drax, are you my papp?" The discreet medical practitioner was dreadfully disconcerted at this crude interrogatory. Old Mrs. Bunycastle bleated, "Lawk a' mercy, what next?" Two of the Miss Bunycastles tittered; but the third, Miss Barbara, told Lily, severely, that she would never be anything better than a little idiot.

Meanwhile, she had set herself, first intuitively, next, of her own volition, to learn things. I don't mean lessons. For the first year all the resources of the law of kindness were powerless to teach her, even her lessons; and although Miss Barbara had a dim impression that she should properly by this time be deep in the mysteries of Mangnall, she forbore, after a while, to set her tasks which she could not by any possibility grasp even the re-

motest meaning of, and consoled herself with the thought that there was plenty of time to rescue her from the perilous condition of a dunce. So Lily was left to a few books that had pictures in them, and but few attempts were made to drum the significance of the accompanying letter-press into her head. She was too small to stand up in a class—too small to have copy-books, or good marks, or bad marks—too small for anything, in fact, save to wander or trot about as she listed from house to playground, from playground to school-ground—now talking to the furniture, and now to the teachers—now listening, with demure astonishment, to the eloquence of Mrs. Bunycastle, which was Greek to her—to the orations of the governesses, which were Hebrew to her—and to the monotonous drone of the young ladies, as at appointed times and seasons they repeated their lessons. In fine, she became as much a pet and plaything in the establishment as any very tiny domestic animal that was neither troublesome nor spiteful, but very playful and very affectionate, might have been. Miss Barbara was of opinion that she should be kept “strict;” but, at last, even she joined in the general cession, and seemed

to be as fond of Lily as every one else in the house was.

But, all this time, Lily was learning things. She knew the playground by heart. She had almost a pre-Raphaelite acquaintance, mentally, with the bricks, with their various hues, now red, now russet, now purple; with the mossy rime that covered some of them, with the small beetles that did wonderful acrobatic feats on their acclivities, rivalling the soldiers of General Wolfe, who marched up rocks that were quite perpendicular. She knew the tears which the strong mortar had shed, on first being laid between the courses, and which the trowel had forgotten to scrape away—tears which the air had hardened into imperishable durability. She knew the spider's web in the south-west angle, by the holly-bush. She was on speaking terms with the spider (a monstrous glutton, who died at last of delirium tremens, brought on by eating a bluebottle who had tipsified himself with the saccharine fermentation of fivopence-halfpenny moist, at a grocer's shop in High-street, Clapham, and so had staggered to Stockwell, to be devoured, and die). She knew that the spider did not always dwell in his web, but that he lay in wait, some-

times, in a little cavern or niche in the bricks, where a French bean peg once had been. The gravel of the playground was familiar to her, and a thrill of delight came over her when she found among the pebbles one day, a broken shell. She knew all about the miniature allotment gardens which the most meritorious among the five-and-thirty were permitted to cultivate, and where they cultivated mustard-and-cress, to be afterwards consumed on half-holiday afternoons at tea-time—mustard-and-cress which tasted hot as ginger to the tongue, and was rather uncomfortably gritty to the teeth. Into these garden-beds the young ladies frequently emptied the proceeds of their pocket-money, in the guise of small brown paper packets of seeds, presumably containing the germs of rare and gorgeous flowers, but which generally ended in disappointment, coming up in various forms of weediness or scrubbiness, but never turning out to be geraniums, or fuchsias, or anything practical. Then, was there not the speculative Miss Newton, who was always planting acorns in the fond hope that some time between their plantation and her going home for the holidays they would sprout up into giant oaks? Was there not Miss Close, the miserly

boarder, who buried halfpence, nay fourpenny-pieces even, in her two flower-pots? And, then, Miss Furblow, the draper's daughter, had a dandy set of garden tools, all shining in iron and newly-turned wood—tools which excited the bitter envy of her companions, who had usually about one half-toothless rake, and one bent spade with a broken handle, to half a dozen horticulturists—tools which she didn't know how to use, and which brought her, at last, to signal grief and mortification?

All these things were noted by Lily; likewise, the grim little back door, fast bolted and barred, which, in former times, had communicated with Mr. Jagg's garden—the cross old gentleman next door. That door was as much an object of grave and wistful contemplation to Lily, as the Debtors' door of Newgate is to some grown people. Would it ever open? Why was it closed? What was there behind it? Mr. Jagg hated the Bunnycastles, and the Bunnycastles hated Mr. Jagg. He spoke scornfully of the five-and-thirty boarders as “a pack of young hussies,” and spitefully lopped off half the spreading branches of his best cherry-tree, because a bough overhung the wall of the Bunnycastle playground. Whereupon Miss Celia

Bunnycastle called in a cunning worker in iron, and caused him to erect a formidable palisade of spikes on the wall, as though to repel any attempts at midnight escalade for nefariously amative purposes by Jagg. Jagg denied the legal right of the Bunnycastles to erect this chevaux-de-frise. There was much acrimonious correspondence; the solicitors of the rival houses were consulted; Jagg only refrained from going to law with Rhododendron House because Rhododendron House had him on the hip, in the fact of one of the maid-servants making solemn asseveration that he was not only in the scandalous habit of winking at her when she went out on errands, but had on one occasion had the unmanly brutality to tell her that she was a "duck." Had justice taken cognisance of the wretch's misdeeds, it would have been an aggravated assault case at the very least—supposing, at least, that wholesome statute to have been in force at the period. The feud at last was compromised, and the chevaux-de-frise was suffered to rust in peace. They were not very firmly fixed, and half of the spikes tumbled over into Jagg's garden: who avenged himself, let us hope, by forthwith disposing of them as marine stores.

There had been, of course, a primary cause for

this envenomed quarrel, but it was wrapt in uncertainty. A teacher who had gone away knew all about it, but to the existing generation it was a mystery. Some said that Mr. Jagg, a widower with one daughter, had wished the Bunnycastles to take her on reduced terms, but that they had declined—standing out to the last that washing, music, and seat at church, should be extras. Others declared that the ladies of Rhododendron House had manifested an almost unseemly anxiety to secure Miss Jagg as an inmate; but that her uncivil parent had contumeliously declared that he would sooner send her to a charity school than to the Bunnycastles. Finally, it was darkly bruited about among the elder girls that, not so many months before, a treaty of alliance, offensive, defensive, and matrimonial, had been in contemplation between the houses of Jagg and Bunnycastle—Miss Celia being the high contracting party of the last-named family. But the treaty had come—as treaties often do—to nothing; and this was why, perhaps, the Saint Scholasticas of Rhododendron House always spoke of the crusty widower as a monster, a villain, and a base wretch; while the unfeeling Jagg, on his side, and with characteristic

coarseness, declared, laying a scornful finger by the side of his ribald nose, that he had found out the whole thing was a Plant, and had declared off, in time.

This was not among the things that Lily learned ; but the mention of the barred-up door reminded me of the great Bunnycastle and Jagg vendetta. It is time, however, to go in-doors. There, the things that the child learned were manifold. Into the drawing-room, and the supper-parlour beyond, she was but rarely permitted to peep, but she studied all the bedrooms—from Mrs. Bunnycastle's imposing chamber, to the less pretentious apartments occupied by the Miss Bunnycastles, and the dormitories, numbered one to five, where the five-and-thirty boarders slept on seventeen and a half iron bedsteads. The half bed was a turn-up one—an imposture—by day an escritoire. The law of kindness had, somehow, omitted to enact that the pupils should not sleep two in a bed ; and Miss Furblow, the draper's daughter, was the only young lady in statu pupillari privileged to have an entire bed—it was the half one, the impostor—to herself.

There were all kinds of things to be learned in

these bedrooms—things grave, and things gay. There were hours of musing evoked from huge chests of drawers—as to whether they grew there, and what they held. There were fearful speculations as to the birds and flowers on chintz draperies, and dreadful images conjured up of what, or who, might be hidden behind heavy curtains, or under Mrs. Bunnycastle's four-poster, or within the parapet of the great canopied tester. There were looking-glasses to be furtively glanced in, and then run away from; portraits and engravings on the wall to study; Moses in the Bulrushes, and Jephtha's Rash Vow; Abraham's Sacrifice, and his late Royal Highness the Duke of York in full regimentals; the Temple of Concord in Hyde Park, and the Horrible Ceremony of Suttee as performed in the East Indies; the Reverend Mr. M'Quashie, Editor of the Pædo-Baptist's Missionary Chronicle, and the Island of Corfu; with other works of art, to be pondered over. There were gowns and shawls to be detached, in imagination, from their pegs and peopled with flesh and blood. There was the great lumber-room, where all the five-and-thirty boarders' boxes were deposited when they came home for the holidays—a

very caravanserai full of trunks. There was the maid-servant's room, where Lily had been made up by the sun, and half terrified to death by the clock on the first morning after her coming. There were chairs to jump on, and hearth-rugs to lift the corners of, and clocks to whose ticking an attentive ear was lent. There were books in cases, and books in hanging shelves, and plated candlesticks, and snuffer-trays, and two great old china mandarins, ready, on the slightest encouragement of a little finger, to loll out their tongues, and wag their peacock's feather and blue-buttoned heads in a manner wonderful, though somewhat awful, to behold. All these objects of research were, to Lily, beautiful, but perplexing. During the long hours of study, while the girls were pent up in the schoolroom, droning and gabbling, and the governesses squabbling with and girding at them, Lily was permitted, whenever she grew tired of school—which was generally about five minutes after she had taken her seat on the little stool apportioned to her—to slip out, and wander up and down the house; whose contents gave her, spark by spark, a little glimmering light. And then, in the play hours, she would ask questions innume-

nable, both of the girls and of the teachers, with a frank fearlessness amazing to the former, who were generally warned off from the premises of inquisitiveness as being "unladylike," and so by degrees, without any book-knowledge, Lily Floris began to learn things.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE YOUNG LADIES.

CÆSAR and Pompey were very much alike; especially Cæsar; by which I mean, the days at Rhododendron House. For weeks, for months, from half year to half year, they knew scarcely any change. It was a well-ordered school, and the management most methodical. The result was a dead level of uniformity, distressing to erratic minds, but delectable exceedingly to those who loved regularity and appreciated discipline.

The “getting-up bell” was the same every day: the five-and-thirty rose amidst the same yawning, stretches, and inarticulate grumblings: there were the same peevish scuffling and unsatisfactory toilette

in the lavatory; the same prayer-meeting, the same homilies; that is to say, when Mrs. Bunycastle had reached the end of the dean's volume, she began again at the beginning, and read the salutary tome through again. The boarders should properly have known those homilies by heart; but I question whether any three of them could have repeated, without book, four consecutive sentences of any one of the dean's discourses. The fact is, the time occupied in this lecture was the time chosen by the young ladies for comparing notes in low whispers on those minor cosas de España, the affairs of school-girls: for passing surreptitious articles of merchandise from hand to hand under the desks, and for "having out" sundry trifling disputes of the previous evening or the instant morning, by the interchange of sly nips and pinches, nudgings and raspings of boots against ankles. They were but children, and I dare say not more spiteful to each other than nuns in a convent. Was it not while Mrs. Bunycastle was warming to the very close of one of the dean's most flourishing perorations, that Miss Dallwallah, the young lady connected with the Honourable East India Company's Civil Service, and who had

been forwarded direct from Serampore to Stockwell with a cautionary note from her papa, stating that she had "a devil of a temper"—was it not then that this young lady, being suddenly roused to ungovernable ire by a pinch from Miss Libscombe, her neighbour, who had a remarkably ingenious knack of holding flesh between her finger and thumb, fell upon that young lady, and bit her in the arm? Mr. Drax had to be sent for; the vindictive Dallwallah's teeth were sharp, and she had drawn blood. The biter, it is regrettable to say, did not manifest the slightest compunction for the outrage. "It served Libby right," she coolly remarked; "and as for biting her arm half through, I'm sure I wish it had been her nose!" Miss Dallwallah was fifteen, and was not only insensible to the law of kindness, but too big to have her ears boxed. She was a very rich young lady; and had so many ornaments of barbaric pearls and gold, that the girls used to call her, Juggernaut. She was a parlour-boarder, and exceedingly good tempered, save when contradicted. The Bunmycastles were puzzled how to treat the case, when they were relieved from their perplexity by the sudden removal of Miss Libscombe by her mamma, who was

fiercely indignant at the treatment her daughter had received, and spoke of Miss Dallwallah as "that hyæna." Miss Miller, who came of country parents, and was the great retailer of superstitious legends and folk-lore to the establishment, opined that Miss Dallwallah was mad, and that sooner or later Miss Libscombe would be seized with hydrophobia.

"She'll bark like a dog," quoth Miss Miller, "and run about biting other girls, and then her father and mother 'll be obliged to have her smothered between two mattresses."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Tallboys, the eldest of the parlour-boarders, and the captainess, indeed, of the school, for she was nearly seventeen years of age. "Smothered between two mattresses indeed! What next? Why, the magistrates wouldn't allow such a thing."

"I tell you it would be done. It's the law."

"I think I ought to know," retorted Miss Tallboys, loftily. "My papa is in the commission of the peace for the county of Kent, and I'm sure he wouldn't allow such cruelty."

"Your papa is only a brewer," Miss Miller went on, in great wrath, "and magistrates are gentlemen."

"I remember his beer," little Laura Smiler broke in, maliciously. "Tallboys and Co.'s Creaming Rochester Ales. My papa used to have it, till he said they put gall instead of hops into it."

"You're an impudent little——" was beginning, in great indignation, the insulted county magistrate's daughter, when the formidable Miss Dallwallah came lounging into the room—it was a half-holiday, and the elder girls were gathered chatting round the stove—in her usual lazily defiant manner.

"Miss Miller says you're mad," broke in a chorus of shrill voices.

"Perhaps you'd like to bite me," Miss Miller herself continued, tossing her curls, which were flaxen, and turning up her nose, which was snub.

"I don't want to bite anybody," replied the Indian, quite humble now. "I *am* a mad passionate creature, and I ought to have said I was sorry I bit Lizzy Libby. I'm sorry I bit her. Only she vexed me. I'm sorry she's gone away, and if I could find out where she lived I'd take her my little enamelled gold watch, and ask her on my knees to accept it and forgive me. But she shouldn't have vexed me."

"She was a vulgar little thing," Miss Tallboys remarked, disdainfully.

"But it was very wicked of me to bite her," went on the repentant Begum. "And Mrs. Bunycastle ought to have punished me. I deserved to be locked up in the coal-hole, with bread and water for a fortnight, only my papa's so rich, and I've always been brought up to do as I like."

"She says her papa's a magistrate," resumed the malevolent Smiler, giving a turn to the conversation.

"*My* papa's a judge, and is the head of a district twice as big again as Yorkshire," resumed Miss Dallwallah, with tranquil dignity.

And, forthwith, all the young ladies plunged into emulous vauntings of their respective parentage, as is the custom of young ladies, and middle-aged ladies, and old ladies—to say nothing of gentlemen—with or without encouragement; and when we are old, and can no longer brag of our parents, we brag of our children, or, haply, being celibate, of our parrots or our lapdogs, our port or our pictures. And so the world goes.

Miss Tallboys, whose christian name was Grace, and who was a slender and elegant blonde; Miss Dallwallah, otherwise Juggernaut, otherwise the Begum, otherwise Lallah Rookh, otherwise the

Sultana Scheherazade, otherwise a hundred other fantastic sobriquets culled from Oriental sources, and sportively bestowed upon her by her comrades, who loved her very dearly when she did not bite ; and Miss Thrupp, whose parents were commercial (Thrupp and Calliper, shipbrokers, Mincing-lane), who was nearly sixteen, and who was amiable, but afflicted with red hair ; were the three senior pupils in Rhododendron House. Their relatives were all wealthy, and they were, consequently, held in much consideration by the Bunnycastle. They did pretty much as they liked. They “studied,” instead of learning lessons, and filled exercise-books with indifferent caligraphy, instead of repeating set tasks. They had masters for all the accomplishments, and acquired as many, or as few of them, as senior pupils at middle-class schools—remember, I am writing of the ante-“college” period—generally do. They spent their liberal allowance of pocket-money as they chose ; and I hope young ladies, who have left school, will not accuse me of libelling their sex, when I record that the major portion of their revenues went in sweet-stuff. Now and then, a servant-maid was bribed to smuggle in a novel from the circulating library ;

but, as a rule, a plentiful supply of almond rock, chocolate drops, and candied horehound, was held to be a more satisfactory pabulum than sentiment in three volumes. At happy sixteen, a girl can dream novels, and invent a hero every five minutes; but it is not enough to dream of almond rock. Sweetstuff is a thing that must be bought.

Mesdemoiselles Tallboys, Thrupp, and Dallwallah, then, condescended to take into high favour and affection the little girl who was left, quite alone, in that scholastic desert. They made a pet and a plaything of Lily Floris. Had she been a little pauper, her pretty face, guileless heart, and winning ways, would have made her a favourite, even with the workhouse matron; but Mrs. Bunycastle's parlour-boarders were predisposed in favour of the baby pupil by mysterious hints from Miss Barbara, who, in her occasional unbosoming of gossiping confidence with the seniors, was wont to descant upon the very grand folks whom she imagined Lily's parents to be. The dazzling diamonds, and scarcely less dazzling teeth, of Mr. Blunt, were still fresh in Miss Bunycastle's recollection, and she gave the daughter of the possessor of those valuables full credit for

them. Miss Barbara's unbosomings were quite enough to make Lily, in the eyes of Miss Tallboys and her companions, a little heroine. There was something mysterious about her, they were glad to recognise. She might be a nobleman's daughter; the offspring, perchance, of a foreign prince. She could tell nothing about her mamma. Poor, little, deserted innocent. They saw it all. A forced marriage; an infant torn away from her agonised parent; an obscure retreat found for the heiress of perhaps boundless domains! They wanted fewer three volume novels smuggled in from the circulating library than ever, for Lily was a whole cabinet library of fiction in herself. But, if they required less romance, they stood in need of more sweetstuff, for they had now an associate to share it. The three friends solemnly adopted Lily, and at once proceeded to make much of her, to the no small content of the ruling powers, who, as the child was too small to stand up in a class, and was occasionally, though not often, given to fretting if no notice were taken of her, were sometimes puzzled to know where and how to bestow her. Lily profited, not only physically, but intellectually, by the patronage of the "great

girls," as the three redoubtable parlour-boarders were called; for Miss Tallboys, shocked at her backwardness, began to teach her in earnest, and before she had been at Rhododendron House a year, had contrived, by kindness and caresses, to instil into her a very fair acquaintance with great A, and little a, and words in one syllable. Miss Thrupp must needs undertake to teach the mite of a thing to dance, which means that she romped about with her in most madcap fashion; and, confident of her educational mission, gravely proclaimed that she was about to "ground her" on the piano. A great many music-books, and a backgammon-board, falsely purporting to be Hume's History of England, had to be piled on the stool before Lily, mounted thereupon, could get her plump hands on a proper level with the keyboard of the rickety old practising piano (Popkinson, Great Swallow-street, Oxford-street, 1809), and her "grounding" did not extend beyond her being allowed to thump the keys, which were worn, and dented, and yellow, like the teeth of an old horse, till she began to crow with delight at the noise she made, or her instructress, laughing, and stopping her ears at the din—though a quarter of

the battered clefs were dumb—bade her, with a kiss, desist. As for the Begum, Juggernaut was not behindhand in activity of patronage to the little darling. She hung strange ornaments of golden filigree round her neck. I believe she would have pierced her ears—and her nose too, so the mischievous girls said—to hang jewelled rings in, had not that surgical operation been expressly inhibited by the scholastic home government. Debarred from the exercise of this decorative Orientalism, it was Miss Dallwallah's chief delight to curl, to brush out, and to curl again, in all sorts of ringlets, tapers, sausages, and corkscrews, Lily's soft brown locks. The child's hair curled naturally, and wanted neither tissue paper nor irons; but Miss Dallwallah was continually improving on nature, and nothing seemed more to delight her than when Lily's hair, after half an hour's elaborate frizzing, or compression under the influence of caloric, assumed the appearance of a highly ornate mop. The child submitted, and was pleased. Once, only, she gave way to a short howl, when Miss Dallwallah inadvertently touched the tip of her ear with the hot tongs, but in general she regarded the philo-comic ordeal as a rare game.

and sport. However, one day, she thought fit to remonstrate against that which was decidedly a work of supererogation.

"My hair curl with water, Missa Lally," she said, looking up into the hairdresser's face with her large blue eyes.

"What a great stupid I am! Of course it will," exclaimed the impetuous Indian (whose petit nom, among her familiars, was "Lally"). "There, I've half spoilt your hair with these nasty hot irons. It'll curl all the wrong way now, of course. It's just like me. I never can do anything properly. I wonder I haven't bitten you into the bargain." And Miss Dallwallah, who was of an impulsive, and not a very strong-minded temperament, and who bitterly remembered her dental escapade with Miss Libscombe, would have taken refuge in tears, had she not been consoled and assured that no harm was done, by Miss Tallboys and Miss Thrupp.

It was a merry time. The "great girls" dressed Lily, and put her to bed. Had she been a squirrel, or a marmoset monkey, they could not have made more of her. As yet, the child had been deemed too small to go to church, and the homilies of the

dean, before breakfast and bedtime, had been thought sufficient theological food for her; but the "great girls" begged so hard that she might be allowed to accompany them, that at last the authorities acceded to the request. To walk to church on Sunday mornings hand in hand with one or the other of her three protectresses, was to Lily the source of enormous pride and gratification. She was very good in church, although she sometimes swung her small legs—which did not reach to within a foot of the ground—in a manner to endanger the stability of neighbouring hassocks; and once or twice, on hot summer Sundays, she went to sleep, and would have tumbled off, but that Miss Tallboys caught her. But, take her for all in all, she was a most devout congregationist, and it was very pleasant to behold her gazing with a rapt wistfulness at the clergyman in the pulpit, and with interest not much less at the clerk in his desk; or nodding her head smilingly to the Psalms (I am dreadfully afraid that she manifested a desire to dance to the Thirty-third), or sitting with a very big prayer-book, of which she could not read one line, open and clutched in her hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LILY IS SENT FOR TO THE DRAWING-ROOM.

YEARS sped on, and the baby became a child, the child a school-girl. Years sped on—outside in wars tumults and revolts, in famines, and shipwrecks, in debates and dancing-parties, in pestilence and in new operas; inside, in the same dull round of little tasks, little duties, little quarrels, little pleasures, little pains. Rhododendron House did not trouble itself about Corporation Reform, or the new Poor Law Board. Unmoved it beheld Strasburg expeditions, Fieschi conspiracies, trials of Dorchester labourers. Fashions came in and came out, but there was no material alteration in the cut of pinafores at Stockwell. Corn-law ques-

tions convulsed the country, and Miss Bunycastle grumbled at the baker's bill, but the five-and-thirty boarders had four thin parallelograms apiece, of bread thinly veneered with Dorset butter, for breakfast, and four for tea, whether wheat was up or down in the market. Currency controversies agitated parliaments, engendered monstrous blue-books, and made financiers' lives a burden to them; but every Saturday at noon, Miss Adelaide Bunycastle appeared in the schoolroom with a tray set out with the boarders' weekly pocket-money, piled in symmetrical little heaps, mainly composed of coppers. The hebdomadal average was fourpence. A young lady who had sixpence a week was held to have an intimate connexion with the plutocracy; a shilling a week, and she was set down wealthy. As for the parlour-boarders, who brought golden sovereigns to school with them after the holidays, and were continually having five shillings (with a cake) sent to them per carrier, they were considered as daughters of the house of Rothschild. Miss Dallwallah had once actually exhibited a five-pound note, payable on demand by the Governor and Company of the Bank of England. It was bran new, crisp, and gleaming. She showed it to

her chosen companions as a mark of high favour towards them. Many were of opinion that it should be framed and glazed. Mrs. Bunycastle, alarmed at the idea of a young lady not yet sixteen having so much money, remonstrated with Mr. Coopinghurst, the commercial gentleman in Austin Friars who was the agent in England of Miss Dallwallah's papa, and at whose country-house at Balham the Sultana Scheherazade passed her Midsummer and Christmas holidays. Mr. Coopinghurst curtly replied, that if Mrs. Bunycastle was not satisfied with her pupil, he was ready to remove the young lady at the next vacation, and that, indeed, he had been thinking of seeking out a superior school for Miss Dallwallah, who, in all probability, would be the inheritress of great wealth. Mrs. Bunycastle thenceforth grumbled no more ; if the Begum had brought half a dozen lacs of rupees back with her in her play-box at the beginning of the next half-year, the schoolmistress would never have proffered a word of complaint.

Lily had grown up to be seven years old. It was agreed on all hands, that although her figure was graceful and well formed, she would never be tall. She had developed by easy stages, and had

not "shot up" in the bean-stalk fashion. The Bunnycastles granted that her brown hair was very soft and wavy, that her hands and feet were very small, that her skin was exquisitely white, that her eyes were very large and blue, that her mouth was delicate and well formed, and garnished with teeth of irreproachable regularity and whiteness; but they authoritatively declared that she was not pretty, and would never become a beauty. She would be "pleasing," nothing more. The truth must out, and I don't think the Bunnycastles libelled her; Lily's nose was so decidedly *retroussé* as to be close upon the absolute snub. But it was a very charming little nose for all that—the coral and ivory nostrils almost transparent, the bridge slight and short, but coquettish, as a bridge over an artificial rivulet in a pleasure-garden. Then her forehead was decidedly a little too low. It has been my fortune to make acquaintance with a number of ladies and gentlemen of all ages, with foreheads as broad and lofty as pumpkins, and who were more or less idiots; therefore I am not disposed to abide by the dictum of Miss Barbara Bunycastle, who deplored the shallowness of Lily's brow, and was certain that she would turn out a

fool. Finally, the shape of her visage inclined more to the square than to the oval. Unrelieved by expression or animation, Lily's face would, from physiognomists—whose broad principles of doctrine one should respect, but whose minute dogmatism on details is to be contemned—have received a sweeping verdict of censure. It is certain that Miss Furbrow, the draper's daughter, who was not very refined in her conversation, once told Lily that she had a face like the portrait of Mr. Tom Spring, the prizefighter. But, all that was irregular and all that was animal in the little girl's countenance found compensation, a hundredfold, in the merry smile that lighted up her lineaments at the slightest encouragement; in the wistful, wishing, intelligent beam that played in her eyes; in her soft and pleading look when she was told a doleful tale. She had a temper of her own, a warm and somewhat peppery one, but it found no vent in black looks, bitten lips, flashing eyes, and clenched hands. When she was moved she turned very red, and spoke very quickly, and then all the pent-up feelings found relief in a flood of passionate tears. It was dangerous to meddle with her then, for she would shake you off with that delightful childish

backward movement of the hand which can only be thoroughly conveyed to the mind of a non-spectator by registering the accompanying interjection: the French "Na," the English "I shan't." But when Lily had said "I shan't," and "Be quiet" (in crescendo), and "It's a shame," a few times, she calmed down, and the sun of her smiles came out in splendour. Her tempers were as easy to quell as they were difficult to rouse. She would bear a prodigious amount of teasing. Injuries, cross words, she would endure with a surprising meekness and equanimity; or she would strive to disarm her persecutor by caresses and endearing speech. But contempt irritated her. She was, when scorned, as pugnacious as a robin-redbreast. You might laugh at her, but it were better not to sneer at her. Perhaps this passionate resentment of contumely arose from Lily being somewhat vain.

She was now seven years old, and neither a dunce nor an intellectual prodigy. Her masters and mistresses had very few complaints to bring against her. Since that first memorable morning when she sat down on the drugget and said "I won't," she had always rendered an implicit and

cheerful obedience to Mrs. Bunmycastle and her assistants. In the way of "doing as she was told," she was a pattern to the other young ladies. Now and then in the schoolroom she was reprimanded for talking at unseasonable times, for her tongue was as alert and vivacious as the "clever pony" in a butcher's cart, and required to be reined in occasionally. Now and then, Miss Barbara had had to scold her for carelessness, for treading her shoes down at heel, for inking her pinafore, or losing her pocket-handkerchief. Once or twice, one of the governesses—but this was when Lily was very young indeed—had been compelled to interfere when she was in her tempers, and had recommended a short sojourn in the corner as a means of cooling those tempers down. These were her gravest scholastic offences, unless, indeed, I take account of one or two desperate attempts she made when she got older, to shield her playfellows from reproof, and to take upon herself the blame they had incurred. I believe all candid and unprejudiced instructresses of feminine youth who read this, will agree with me that the two master vices with which they have to cope are the proneness of their young charges to pertness and sauciness in

reply, and their painful addictedness to that form of deception which is known as "slyness." But Lily was never pert, and she could not be sly. With the exception of the attempts at shielding offenders mentioned above, which were usually so transparent as to be at once detected, she would not venture even upon a white lie.

Be it also, to the honour of the little woman, recorded, that she never grumbled. Now, in order to be a grumbler at school it does not at all follow that you must be ill treated. Discontent is as often the result of satiety as of privation. A lapdog oftener growls over his chicken and cream, than a mongrel does over his bare bone. At plentiful harvests farmers (who murmur at everything, and would have "wanted rain" in the garden of Eden) murmur most. I dare say that a workhouse child fed on gruel and "seconds" bread from year's end to year's end, is, in the long run, less given to repine at her lot than a young lady at boarding-school, with three abundant meals a day, and the certainty of enjoying meals as many, and as abundant, on the morrow. The Bunnycastle were economical, and made as much out of the housekeeping as they, with decency, conveniently could;

but they neither starved the five-and-thirty, nor fed them on coarse and unwholesome food, pregnant with boils and blains and skin diseases. The butcher's cart called regularly, and the joints he brought were, if not prime, nourishing. But Lily lived, nevertheless, in an atmosphere of grumbling. The great girls had no dearer pastime than to gird at their instructresses, and accuse them of the most deliberate meanness in the article of dietary. The Miss Bunmycastles could never assume a new silk dress without its being darkly hinted in the school-room that it was "got out of us girls." The first plateful of meat at dinner-time was denounced as shamefully deficient as to quantity and quality; the second "help" was held up to scorn as a shameful and cruel imposture. The Wednesday mess of fish and boiled rice was cited as a standing attempt to rob the boarders of their due, and their parents of the money they paid. "Unlimited diet, indeed!" would cry Miss Furblow, tossing up her head. "Is that nasty suet-pudding they give us twice a week, unlimited diet?" Satirical poems were made against the meat-pie, which made its appearance every Monday morning. Occasionally the round of beef and mutton was relieved by a piece

of veal, and then the malcontents declared that Clodshop (Clodshop was the butcher) had lost a calf by disease, and had sold it to the Bunny-castles, cheap. There was no end to their grumbling. Lily listened to it all, marvelling greatly, but forbearing to join in the chorus of complaints. She ate her meals thankfully, and did not find her food either scanty or repulsive. Perhaps she was too young to be a judge of cookery. Perhaps, never having had a home, she was not in a position to draw invidious comparisons. And yet I scarcely think that the young ladies who were among the most inveterate grumblers had been, as a rule, nursed in the lap of luxury; many of them had been at other schools where they were worse treated, and worse fed. But it was the fashion to abuse the dietary; and those who spoke well of it were voted mean-spirited creatures. The insatiable appetite of female youth—for between ten and fourteen there are few things, out of the line of a cormorant, to equal a girl's voracity—may have had something to do with it; nor, on the other hand, are young ladies at school the only persons in the world who are given to quarrelling with their bread-and-butter.

If Lily had been anything of a tale-teller there would have been sad work between the authorities and the pupils, owing to these chronic criticisms on the cuisine. The child had full license to come and go between the schoolroom and the parlour; and might have been found a very convenient spy in the two naturally hostile camps. A Jesuit's mouth would have watered to instruct her in the arts of secret diplomacy; but she knew nothing of leasing-making; and somehow her open face and artless ways made those who might have trained her to be a hypocrite at school, ashamed of their design, and abortive in their intent.

She had now been three years and a half at Rhododendron House, and the sum agreed upon for her maintenance and education had been regularly paid in yearly sums, always in advance, by orders on a banker in Cornhill. The drafts came accompanied by short notes written in a foreign hand, but in very good English: in which a person signing himself J. B. Constant said that he had the honour to enclose the amount of Miss Floris's account, and that he would not trouble Mrs. Bunycastle to make any communication to him, for the information of her papa, as to the

young lady's health and progress, since, from means at his command, he was well informed upon those matters himself. To the satisfaction of the Bunycastlees at receiving so liberal a stipend for the board and education of such a very little girl, was added a vague apprehension of losing her if they did not treat her with every kindness, and a dim consciousness that their proceedings were being watched over by some occult external influence. It was under these circumstances, and when Lily was fast verging upon her eighth year, that she was one morning dressed in her best and told that she was to be taken at once to the drawing-room, where a strange lady waited to see her.

CHAPTER XIX.

LILY'S VISITORS.

MISS FLORIS sent for to the drawing-room! A strange lady for Lily! The whole school wondered at the news. There was a commotion. The very maid-servants were amazed. Such a thing had never occurred during the little girl's three years and a half's residence at Rhododendron House. She had been set down, by general acceptance: not as a friendless child—for that implied pauperism, and the regular discharge of Lily's school-bills was sufficient evidence of her having friends somewhere—but as one whose connexions, whoever they were, resided far away, and were deterred, by major reasons, from coming to visit her.

Miss Dallwallah was, to some extent, in the same position: the requirements of the Indian Civil Service detaining her papa in his distant bungalow, and her mamma being dead; but no one would have dared to call Miss Dallwallah friendless. The Begum went home, regularly for the holidays, to the commercial gentleman at Balham; whereas Lily had never passed, save under scholastic escort, the outer gates of Rhododendron House. Those weary weeks passed in the deserted schoolroom and the scarcely less deserted house—for the Miss Bunycastlees were accustomed in holiday-time to repair to the pleasant shores of Ramsgate and Margate, in quest of health and husbands; and Mrs. Bunycastle was not, at the best of times, very amusing company for a little girl not yet eight years of age—were full of sorrowful memories for Lily. Inquisitive as she was, and fond of the contemplation of external objects that she might build mental speculations upon them, one is apt to grow tired at last, of peering into inkstands in whose caked depths florid growths of white fungi have accumulated. The dusty débris of last half's slate pencils will at last lose their charm, and novelty cease to

emerge from the names of bygone pupils cut on desks and forms. Lily remembered, with a shuddering dread, the lonely dinners and teas that used to be served to her in the schoolroom; the sepulchral ticking of clocks all over the premises; the boldness of a certain black rat that used to sally from beneath the meat-screen bookcase, and watch her as she fed, and wink at her with fierce red eyes, as though he said, "Drop me plenty of crumbs, or, by my grandmother's whiskers, I will scale the stool on which your tiny body is perched, and eat you up!" Lily was always glad when the holidays were over. And when Mrs. Bunycastle's young friends came back, grumbling, as usual, at having to recommence their studies, and leave their beds when the "getting-up" bell rang, she wondered, in her simple soul, whatever they could have to be discontented with.

After she had been dressed, and brushed, and tidied, and made generally spruce and shining as a new pin, Miss Barbara took her by the hand, and led her to the best parlour.

There was a lady waiting for her. She was a very handsome lady, not in her first youth, but in her second, which, very probably, was handsomer

than the first had been. She was very splendidly dressed : so splendidly, that Lily, suddenly collecting all that she had heard about the Arabian Nights, instantly put her down as the absolute and visible impersonation of that Sultana Scheherazade, of whom Miss Dallwallah was the imaginary type. She had a great deal of silk about her that rustled, and of lace that fluttered, and of flowers that waved, and a great many ornaments of jewels and gold that jingled, and made a shine. It occurred to Lily that had she purchased the picture of that lady from the gallery of Mr. Marks, or Mr. Park, for a penny plain, she would cost at least twelve and sixpence to emblazon and finish off completely in tinsel.

The visitor did not appear, however, to be either a very patient, or very good-tempered lady. She had been kept for some time waiting, and it had made her cross. She was drumming on the ground with her feet, and rapping Mrs. Bunycastle's great circular walnut-wood drawing-room table with her parasol : a potent lady, indeed, so to presume to rap that revered article of furniture ! Moreover, when Miss Barbara, with Lily meekly trotting after her, entered the apartment, she

turned to the former with a very quick and fierce movement, and said :

“Had you not better keep me all day? Is this little brat a princess, that I am to dance attendance for hours before she grants me an audience?”

Lily opened her eyes at being spoken of as a brat. No such ill-natured term had ever yet been applied to her. This was evidently a very cross lady: as cross as the tall English teacher, who was sent away for pulling the girls' ears when they were remiss in their geography—the Miss Bunnycastles observing, at the time, and with perfect propriety and candour, that if anything of that kind was to be done, they could do it themselves. Lily noticed, too, apart from the angry vehemence of the lady's manner, that her voice did not resemble that of the Bunnycastles, or of any English girl in the school. She spoke more like *Made-moiselle*, for shortness called “*Mamselle*,” French governess at *Rhododendron House*, who was accustomed to rail against the Bunnycastles as “*tyrannical Megæras*,” to have the toothache, and to weep about her ancestors.

Miss Barbara drew herself up somewhat, at being thus abruptly addressed. Alone, it would

not have so much mattered ; but, in the presence of a scholar, to be snubbed was intolerable. Did not Doctor Busby, when he went over Westminster School with King Charles the Second, apologise to his majesty for keeping his hat on, upon the ground that if his boys were led for an instant to imagine that there was in the whole world a greater personage than he, his authority would be lost for ever ? So, Miss Barbara drew herself up, and looked sharp-edged rulers, or whatever the law of kindness was capable of resorting to in moments of resentment, at the aggressor.

“My mamma, madam,” she explained, with the polite severity of offended dignity, “is confined to her bed by sickness, else she would have received you. My sisters are detained in the schoolroom by their scholastic duties. With my own hands I have prepared Miss Floris for the visit which, during three years and a half, her friends have never condescended to pay her instructresses.”

“She ought not to want any preparation,” returned the lady, with undiminished violence. “Do you keep her in a pigsty that she is not fit to be seen when her”—she stopped herself for an in-

stant—"when her friends call upon her? Come here, child."

Lily answered the summons not very willingly. The handsome angry lady terrified her. She was accustomed, however, to do as she was bid, and obeyed the command: approaching the lady, however, sideways, and with one small forefinger in her mouth.

"Don't look like a fool," cried the handsome lady.

Lily did not know what else to look like; or, to an uninterested spectator, she might have looked very much like a little girl in active preparation for a good cry. Her perturbation was increased when the strange visitor, pulling the child towards her, and with no very gentle hand offered very unmistakable evidence that she was about to undress her. She stayed her hand, however, at the sight of Lily's little gleaming white shoulders, which—a most curious and inconsequential lady, this—she proceeded, incontinent, to cover with very fierce hot kisses. And then, that nothing might be wanting to the oddity of her demeanour, she pushed the child away again.

"There," she said, "I see you're clean enough.

Do you give her a bath every morning?" she resumed, addressing Miss Barbara.

"Miss Floris," retorted that young lady, combining a diplomatic evasion with much moral suavity, "has constantly received unremitting attention, both as regards her physical and mental requirements."

"How fine you schoolmistresses talk!" the lady went on, not, apparently, in the slightest degree touched by the governess's eloquence. "It is all in the advertisement, I suppose—I'll announce.—What is your name, child?"

The little girl opened her eyes; and Miss Barbara opened hers too. Had not the strange lady asked for Miss Floris?

"Lily," the child answered.

"Lily what?"

"Lily Floris, ma'am."

"Beast of a name. We must change it. How old are you?"

Lily looked appealingly at Miss Barbara.

"I have reason to believe," Miss Bunycastle remarked, with lofty condescension, "that Miss Floris is rapidly approaching her eighth birthday."

"Are you happy here?" resumed the lady, not

deigning to acknowledge Miss Bunycastle's volunteered statement.

"Yes, ma'am," the child replied, with all the sincerity of eight years of age. The lady frowned at this somewhat; but Miss Bunycastle rendered thanks to Lily, in her secret soul. "It was always an engaging little thing," she admitted mentally.

"Do they beat you?" the lady continued.

"No, ma'am," the child returned, opening her eyes wider than ever.

"Tant pis," said the lady. "When I was young they used to beat me like a sack. It is true," she added, turning to Miss Barbara.

Miss Bunycastle made a genteel inclination of the head, which might mean anything; but I believe that in the recesses of her mind the thought just then was uppermost, that if that handsome lady had been one of her young lady-boarders, and of a convenient age, she would have given her some *vivâ voce* exemplifications of the law of kindness, which should have been of a nature to astonish her.

"I suppose it's good for children, the stick, and all that," the lady added, musing. "It did me a

torrent of good, to be sure. It made me love everybody so. There," she cried, giving her body a sudden wrench, as though she wished to rid herself of an unpleasant theme of thought, "I dare say you're too frightened to tell the truth while your schoolmistress is near. Please to have her dressed, and I will take her out for a walk."

The last part of her speech was addressed to Miss Barbara, and the governess thought it high time to make a stand upon it.

"Madam," she said, with freezing politeness, "Miss Floris was placed here, three years and a half since, by two gentlemen, who, in confiding her—then almost an infant—to our charge, strictly stipulated that she was never to leave it, save under direct instructions from——"

"Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant," the lady interposed, and, for a wonder, very coolly. "I know all about that. M. Constant is the agent for Miss Floris's guardian, and M. Constant pays her school-bills every year."

"Precisely so," Miss Barbara returned. "Therefore, without instructions from M. Constant——"

"You wouldn't let her go: at least you'd say you wouldn't, although, if I chose, I'd have the

child out of this house, if fifty dragoons with drawn swords stood at the door to oppose it. But what nonsense all this is. Do you know the handwriting of M. Jean Baptiste Constant?"

"Perfectly well, madam."

"Then read that: get the child's hat and pelisse on, and let me hear no more about it."

She opened a pretty reticule, all velvet and golden beads, and flung rather than handed to Miss Bunycastle a note written in M. Constant's remarkably small and neat handwriting, in which, with many compliments to the amiable Madame and Mademoiselles Bunycastle, he requested them, in all respects, to obey such directions as should be given to them in respect to Miss Lily Floris, by Madame la Comtesse de Prannes, that young lady's nearest female relative.

"The letter, I see, is dated Paris," Miss Bunycastle replied, after reading and re-reading the note, but still with a certain amount of hesitation.

"Whence else?" returned the lady, with impetuosity. "He being in Paris. M. Jean Baptiste Constant is ill. He is in bed. He has an aneurism."

"And you, madam?"

"You are very inquisitive. I am Miss Floris's

nearest female relative. I am Madame la Comtesse de Prannes. There is my card, which I gave to your dirty slut of a servant. Would you like to know anything else? Where I was born? When I was baptised? At what age I made my first communion?"

The last straw broke the camel's back. The Bunycastle had borne, though with much inward raging, with all the discourtesy of the strange lady, but that allusion to her neat-handed Phillis as a "dirty slut" was too much for her. She cast M. J. B. Constant's letter from her, and, with a heightening colour, exclaimed:

"I won't let the dear little child go. I don't know who you are, or what you mean. Your manners are most insulting, and unless the gentlemen come themselves to fetch Miss Floris, or M. Constant sends a messenger who knows how to behave herself, the darling shan't go. Do you want to go, Lily?"

The subject of this controversy, simply reasoning that the strange lady frightened her, and that she was very fond of Miss Bunycastle, and, moreover, that it was decidedly preferable to be called a darling than a brat, replied, her little heart pal-

pitating violently, that she was very happy where she was, and that she didn't want to go away with anybody.

"I thought so!" Miss Barbara exclaimed, triumphantly catching the child to her. "A pretty thing, indeed, to be tutored and domineered over in one's own house. You have your answer, madam, and I must wish you a good morning." And she made as though she would have rung the bell to have the importunate visitor ushered out.

But Miss Barbara Bunnycastle reckoned without her host. The strange lady rose in a rage.

"You devil!" she cried. Such language in a genteel establishment for young ladies! "I will have the child. Do your worst. I say she shall go with me. You madwoman, go and ask your mother and sisters, and they will make you listen to reason. Call in the police, if you like, and see what a charming figure your school will make in the journals. Go, idiot, and take advice."

She set her teeth together, and glared at Miss Barbara as though she would devour her. The schoolmistress was fairly appalled. Was the lady mad? Something must be done, and on reflection she concluded that the best thing she could do was

to consult Celia and Adelaide. The front gate was fast locked, and the lady would hardly be so desperate, she thought, as to scale the iron railings. But how to leave her in the drawing-room, and how to get her away from Lily?

The stranger seemed to divine her thoughts. "Ring the bell, if you like," she said, "and tell the other women to come here. I'm not afraid of twenty of them. But I'll tell you what! Before I leave this room without the child, I'll smash every window, and set fire to the house." And the lady decidedly looked as though she meant what she said.

It was a strange dilemma: an uprooting of all the conventionalities, an unheard-of revolution in the ordinarily placid world of Rhododendron House. A servant was rung for, and the Miss Bunnycastles summoned. Then, a special embassy was despatched to Mrs. Bunnycastle up-stairs; but the old lady, who was now growing very feeble, and was not quite valid, mentally, could suggest nothing, and confined herself to a general remark that "she never heard of such goings on." As a last resource, Mr. Drax was sent for. That discreet practitioner happened fortunately to be at home, and

on his arrival at the school did his best to throw oil on the troubled waters. He advised concession. M. J. B. Constant's handwriting was undeniably genuine. M. J. B. Constant's wishes must be attended to. Moreover, there was nothing owing. Lily's bill was always paid in advance, and there were at least six months to run, to the next term of payment. The lady was evidently a lady. (To be sure, Mr. Drax had not seen her in a rage.) Clearly, the only course to adopt was to accede to her very rational demand.

It happened, at this conjuncture, that the strange lady's bearing underwent a remarkable change for the better. She condescended to smile on Mr. Drax. She told him that he had acted with great discretion: which expression tallied so exactly with the quality on which he so much prided himself, that Mr. Drax was in ecstasies, and even Celia and Adelaide thought that their sister had been a little too hasty. To be sure, they, too, had not seen the handsome lady in a rage. She, on her part, volunteered the information that she was Lily's aunt, that her only object in temporarily removing her was to take her out for a holiday and purchase her some new clothes; and she faithfully

promised to return with the child, on that self-same evening. Finally, a treaty of peace was arranged. As a matter of form, a fresh embassy was despatched to Mrs. Bunnycastle, to obtain her consent, as chief of the establishment, to Miss Floris's temporary departure; but that good lady merely told her daughters that they might do as they liked, and expressed a desire not to be "worried." Poor, placid Mrs. Bunnycastle: we shall see thee no more.

Lily, who had stood and wondered throughout the whole of this strange argument, was at length conducted to a bedroom and arrayed in her walking clothes. Miss Barbara it was who buttoned on her pelisse, and tied her hat beneath her dimpled chin; but Miss Barbara, although she had been forced to yield to superior numbers was by no means satisfied in mind, at the upshot of the dispute.

"You'll be sure to come back early this evening," she said, as kneeling on the floor to adjust a bow, she gazed earnestly in the child's face.

"Yes, Miss Babby" (this was the *petit nom* which, of all the five-and-thirty boarders, Lily, the chartered pet of the establishment, was privileged to address Miss Barbara by). "Yes, Miss Babby,"

Lily whimpered, "and I'm sure I don't want to go away at all."

"There, you mustn't cry," Miss Barbara, who was on the point of shedding tears herself, hastily interposed; "it's naughty, and not like a great girl, you know. Mind you're back by evening prayers. If you don't, you'll be punished." This was said with a touch of Miss Barbara Bunycastle's ordinary and scholastic sententiousness, but her heart was not in her words, and, casting her arms around the little girl's neck, and without any valid reason in the world that I know of, she wept over her as though her heart would break.

The same quite irrational impulse led Miss Barbara, after Lily had been carried off in a kind of sweeping and defiant triumph by the strange lady who had so remarkable a temper, to shed many more tears. It was foolish, she admitted, but she couldn't help it. The child would be back soon. There was no harm in her going out. Her sisters were quite satisfied. Mr. Drax had pledged his discretion to the authenticity of J. B. Constant's autograph. But Miss Barbara mistrusted, and Miss Barbara wept, she knew not why. Somehow, this little brown-haired blue-eyed maiden had twisted

herself round her heart, and she felt as though the charming little parasite had been rudely torn away. She dried her eyes, and put on, as well as she could manage it, the scholastic countenance, and then she went down into the schoolroom and took a geography class. Her temper was tried in the usual manner. There was the usual average of stupid young ladies, careless young ladies, young ladies who were pert, and young ladies who were aggravating. She ground, for the five thousandth time, the dreary old barrel-organ to its accustomed round of tunes, but her spirit was far away. Her heart yearned for Lily. She distributed good marks and bad marks unconsciously, and she was inexpressibly grateful for tea-time: not alone because her wearisome task was over, but because the time had grown nearer when she thought the child would return.

That a schoolmistress is a "cross old thing," and nothing more, whole generations of young ladies have unanimously agreed. In regions far remote from the schoolroom and its petty verdicts, polite society finds little difficulty in setting down the governess as a prim, precise, fastidious personage, full of angular ways and ludicrous rigidity. She

is somebody to be caricatured, or snubbed, or superciliously patronised. Ah! if we only thought a little more of what she had to go through. Ah! if we only reflected a little on how sick grows the head that has to listen to the strains, how numb grows the hand that has to turn, turn, turn, that everlasting barrel-organ! Men, with a smug complacency, repeat, one after the other, that women have a special aptitude for teaching; that they are patient, willing, persuasive, and the rest; and then, with pitiless politeness, condemn them to grind the barrel-organ for the term of their natural lives. That men are not so eminently fitted for the task of tuition is shown by their losing patience half a dozen times in the course of a lesson, and falling on the cubs they are licking into shape and thrashing them fiercely; but gentle, long-suffering woman is contented to go on mildly nagging, and wrangling, and moralising over the cubs, when they decline to dance to the very genteelist of tunes. In the female wards of every lunatic asylum you are sure to meet with one or two demented schoolmistresses. I often wonder that for the one or two, I don't meet a dozen.

Tea-time came and went; then play-hour; then

study-hour; at last, the times for reading prayers and going to bed. Miss Floris had not come back. Her continued absence was common talk in the schoolroom. Among the girls, one party, the more imaginative, speculated on the dreadful things that would be done to a pupil who stayed beyond her leave; another, and more practical section, opined that Lily would be held harmless, seeing what a favourite she was with the authorities.

Time went on, and the Miss Bunnycastles sat down to that supper which they were too sick at heart to eat. The clock was on the stroke of ten, when the outer gate bell rang.

"'Tis she! 'tis Miss Floris!" cried Barbara; "the dear little thing!"

"The naughty little minx, rather!" added Celia, with some asperity.

"Perhaps it isn't her fault," pleaded Adelaide; "she may have been taken ill. But here she is!"

The door opened, and the maid appeared, with a scared face, announcing not Lily, but a gentleman; and close upon her heels, there followed, nearly breathless with haste, nearly wild with excitement, Jean Baptiste Constant.

“The child!” he cried; “the child, dear ladies! Has she come back?”

A trembling negative had to be returned to his question.

“Oh! I am ruined, I am ruined!” the Swiss went on. “Where is she? What have you done with her? Oh! my little, little Lily. She has been stolen, stolen by that monster of a woman. Malediction!”

And for a long time, this was all that could be got out of J. B. Constant. He persisted in declaring that he was ruined. By degrees, he calmed down a little, and explained that, at five o'clock that afternoon, he had seen the child pass, in a hackney-coach, with a person in whose company (so with much vehemence he declared) she had no right to be. It was in Regent-street. He had followed the coach as rapidly as he could, and, by voice and gestures, had endeavoured to arrest its progress. But all was in vain. The place was Regent-street; the time, the full tide of afternoon life. At length, in despair, he had been compelled to abandon the chase, vainly endeavouring to persuade himself that he might have been mistaken. He had made scores of inquiries—perquisitions, he

called them—in places whither he thought it at least faintly probable that Lily might have been conveyed; and, at length, he had come to Rhododendron House.

The Bunnycastles could do little to console him. They made the most of their reluctance to allow Lily to leave; but what were they to do? They had long hesitated, but had at last acted on the advice of Mr. Drax, a trusted and discreet friend.

“Curse Mr. Drax!” cried the valet, fiercely. “Drax is a goose, a pig, a donkey!” And I am afraid the discomfited Miss Bunnycastles felt at that moment very much inclined to agree with J. B. C. Drax’s renown for discretion was gone for ever.

They showed J. B. Constant the note purporting to be in his handwriting. He flung it from him with something very like an oath, and a yell of rage.

“A forgery, an infamous forgery!” he cried, distractedly. “Fool that I was, not to have foreseen the possibility of such a fraud. That woman would do anything!”

“And whatever will your master say?” naïvely

remarked Miss Adelaide, who had been eyeing the valet with much curiosity.

“My master!” he repeated; “burn my master! This little angel was worth twenty thousand masters to me.”

Grief made him garrulous, but his communicativeness was not of a nature to satisfy the Buny-castles. As the payments had all been made in advance, and the customary references dispensed with, they felt the indelicacy of pressing him with direct questions. Very little that was definite could be extracted from J. B. Constant. He would mention no names; but, when the card of Madame la Comtesse de Prannes was shown to him, he tore it, contemptuously, in half, and muttered, “Bah! one of her twenty aliases.”

The council remained in session until an hour was attained quite unexampled in the annals of this well-conducted establishment. But Lily did not come back. Indeed, to Rhododendron House she was not to return again. J. B. Constant, with lowering looks, but with many protestations of regret at having disturbed the ladies, took his leave, saying, that if the child did not come back,

they were very welcome to keep what remained of her wardrobe as some slight compensation for the trouble they had taken. And then the Bunny-castles were left desolate. The compensation was very slight indeed. Barbara had to mourn the loss of her darling, and would not be comforted; and her two more practical sisters were bound in bitterness to acknowledge that the payments, having been made in advance, they could not demand even so much as a quarter's notice for the sudden removal of their young lady-boarder.

CHAPTER XX.

LILY GOES OUT TO DINNER.

THE handsome lady, who, probably to serve her own purposes, had been bland and almost affable while the treaty of peace with the Bunnycastles and Mr. Drax was being concluded, was seemingly of a most capricious disposition. At all events, she informed Lily, so soon as they were outside the gate of Rhododendron House, that she would box her ears well, if she made any noise, or gave her any further trouble; and the child, quite unaccustomed to harsh treatment, or even threats, followed her new protectress in a very subdued, but scarcely cheerful manner.

The Clapham stage—peace to its short memory

—was in existence in those days, and it was by means of this conveyance that Lily was brought to the metropolis. First of all, however, the lady took her into a pastrycook's shop, and bought her a very large Bath bun, which she apparently considered a sovereign remedy for all the sorrows of childhood, for when Lily had half eaten it, she said to her, not quite so sharply as before :

“Now, are you quite happy?”

Lily had not attained the summit of human felicity, but she deemed it expedient to temporise with a personage so stern as the personage who talked of boxing her ears. She murmured an affirmative.

“That's right,” pursued the lady. “Be a gentle little darling, very sage and obedient, and I will love you. Don't vex me, or I shall have an attack of nerves. *Satanée migraine, va!*” This last remark she made in a language which Lily did not understand; and she noticed that the lady made remarks, in the same incomprehensible tongue, rather frequently. She noticed, also, that the lady, after bestowing on her the Bath bun, ate a macaroon herself, and called for a glass of cherry brandy; that, after drinking it, she declared it to

be "detestable," and demanded a glass of water, the which beverage she characterised as "infamous poison." Likewise, Lily noted that her protectress apostrophised the young person in ribbons and ringlets who officiated behind the counter of the pastrycook as an "impertinent"—an impertinent, simply, not an impertinent anything—and that she vehemently protested that there was a bad half-penny among her change. The change itself she flung at the head of a beggar-boy, who was lurking at the door, licking his lips at sight of the greasy delicacies in the twopenny tray; but the handful of halfpence hurt the side of his head so that he yelped with pain, and forbore to thank her. Then, she swept out of the shop, nearly overturning an old gentleman in a white hat, who was seated on a cane-bottomed chair, meekly lunching on a sausage-roll, and leaving the young lady in ribbons and ringlets in semi-hysterics of indignant mortifications.

There were two inside places vacant in the Clapham stage, and Lily, for the second time in her life, was installed in a coach. She had been such a little recluse at school, that the great outside world seemed almost as strange to her as it

might to a cloistered nun, transferred, for some occult monastic reason or other, from convent to convent.

Lily gazed about her as wistfully and as earnestly as ever a nun could do; but she wore no veil, nor had she a breviary; so she began to ask the lady a host of questions about the things on the road, which she saw from the windows of the stage; as who lived in those tall houses; why there were gates and bars across the road, with men in white aprons, and with red faces, who darted out of the little hovels, and seemed so angry—to judge from their hoarse voices—when ever a carriage came through. The lady was not very communicative. Once or twice, she said “Absurd!” Then, she cried “Peste!” At last, she bade the child be silent.

The journey, however, was saved from being entirely uneventful, by a few fierce verbal encounters between the lady and the two other inside passengers. One of these, a tall young man, with weak eyes, an eruptive countenance, speckled stockings and shoes, the lady accused of rudely staring at her. She called him several injurious names, and made him generally so mise-

rable, that the young man, well-nigh moved to tears, got out at Kennington Common, foregoing half the amount of locomotion to which he was entitled. Then she had a passage of arms with an old gentleman in a bottle-green spencer and a frill, whom she charged with having wilfully trodden on her feet; but, in this last case, she had reckoned without her host, for it turned out that the old gentleman had a temper of his own, and was not inclined to brook indignity with meekness.

"I didn't do anything of the sort, mum," quoth the old gentleman, with rising wrath, on the charge being repeated.

"Sir, you are gross! you are brutal! you are elephantine!" retorted the lady.

"Upon my word, I think the woman's mad," exclaimed the old gentleman. "I'm very glad that I'm not your husband, mum."

"Insolent: again your horrible boots are crushing my feet."

"Confound your feet!" screamed the old gentleman, in a fury. "I never touched 'em. Here, guard, let me get out. And as for you, my darling," he continued, turning to Lily, "I wish

you joy of your grandmother, and I wouldn't be in your shoes for something. Good morning, mum, and a more Christian temper to you!" And so saying, the old gentleman got out in dudgeon at the southern foot of Westminster Bridge.

They went on without any more adventures to the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, where they alighted. The lady and her charge swept away, and the coachman and the guard both turned their heads to look at them.

"Fine woman, Bill," observed the coachman.

"Good stepper!" agreed the guard; "stunning action and rattling pace. But ra-a-ther a kicker; eh, Josh?"

"I shouldn't like to be the splashboard," replied the coachman, "that she was in the pheayton of. Kick! She'd kick the Tower of London into toothpicks. Good 'un to bite, too, I should think. Say nothin' of rearin' and plungin'. She's a real live woman, Bill, and no mistake."

The subject of this criticism had hold pretty tightly of Lily's hand, and walked with her a few paces eastward. Then she stopped, and said:

"Ah! you've just come from school: you'd like to be amused, wouldn't you?"

It was certain that Lily hadn't been very much amused up to that moment; and she saw but little chance of recreation in the company of this very strange lady. She murmured something, however, which the hearer might construe pretty much as she chose; and the lady, electing to take the words as a sign of acquiescence, proceeded to amuse Lily.

She took her first into the Adelaide Gallery, which was then a kind of Polytechnic Institution, and crowded with numbers of models, and skeletons, and maps, and drawings, all supposed to conduce towards a knowledge of science among the million. The million were there, in the shape of many old ladies in beaver bonnets, and school-children, and raw bumpkins, and persons of the country-cousin order, generally. They poked their fingers into the models, and peered between the decks of the pretty toy-ships to see where the captain's cabin was, and gave themselves galvanic shocks, at which they danced, and—the younger ones—howled dismally. Then they inhaled doses of laughing gas. And then they had a stocking-weaving machine, and a steam-gun, explained to them, and tried hard to look as though they un-

derstood those scientific inventions. Subsequently Lily looked through a number of little round holes, and saw some very brilliant pictures, which, she was told, represented Lisbon, Chandernagore, Manilla, and the like: at the which she clapped her hands in not unfamiliar glee, for a man with a peep-show had once been admitted to the playground of Rhododendron House. The Bunny-castles took care to put his entertainment in the bills of the five-and-thirty boarders, under the head of "Admission to a geographical and pictorial exhibition." Then, at the ringing of a bell, they were conducted into a dark room, where an unseen gentleman, with a hollow voice, as from the tombs, delivered a lecture, the preliminary part of which was so dreary, and so full of long words, that it almost made Lily cry; and then he exhibited on an illuminated tablecloth, something that was like the spider at Rhododendron House, only magnified eight hundred million times; and to this strange presentment he gave a name to which that of rhododendron was monosyllabic. There was another lecture in another room from a pleasant gentleman with a bald head and a north country accent, who was surrounded by bottles

and glasses, and poured the contents of one phial into another, and turned green water into red, and popped little twisted pieces of tow into them, whereupon they caught fire, and who seemed to be trying his very hardest to blow himself up—which, indeed, in his ardour for science, he did, on an average, once in six months. “A pleace the filin’s oonder the receiver, and boobles of gass weell arise,” quoth the bald-headed gentleman; and then bubbles of gas did arise, and there was a sharp crackling noise, and the audience clapped their hands, till another bell rang, and everybody ran off to see a patent potter’s wheel, supposed to make any number of cups and saucers, elaborately painted, by merely touching a spring, but which habitually confined itself to spattering cascades of white mud upon the clothes of the spectators. Lily was delighted with everything, only somewhat confused, and the lecture with the magnified spider and the long name decidedly frightened her.

She was not sorry when, it being about three o’clock in the afternoon, they went out into the Strand again. The lady had swept through the Adelaide Gallery in the disdainful manner cus-

tomary with her, and now and again sternly reprehending strangers for crowding upon her, or treading on the skirts of her robe. The country cousins, however, did not seem to mind her much, and one of them was venturous enough to ask if, the room not being big enough for her, she thought St. Paul's would be? Whereupon she tossed her head and looked Perkins's steam-guns at him. She condescended, however, to laugh at the galvanic shocks the cousins gave themselves, and remarked that the invention was droll.

Lily observed that when they were in the street she always held her very tight by the hand, and looked about her a great deal, and that once she told her, if any one tried to take her away, to allow herself to be torn in ten thousand pieces first.

"Not that there is any danger," she continued, more to herself than to Lily; "not that I am afraid. Oh no. I am strong—strong enough for ten armed men. But bah! let them come. What nonsense. My monsters are abroad. Are you hungry?" she went on, looking down at the little girl.

Lily, accustomed to the early and regular meals

of Rhododendron House, answered that she would like to have her dinner, if the lady pleased.

“Dinner!” repeated the lady. “Absurdity! You are to dine by-and-by with the gentlemen. You must wait. Come, little glutton, and have another cake.”

She took the little glutton into another pastry-cook’s, and presented her, as heretofore, with a Bath bun. But when Lily had picked the caraway seeds and the spiculæ of lump sugar off the sticky varnished surface, she found she had no appetite for the sweet, saffron-coloured dough beneath. She wanted her little plate of meat, and the potatoes that mashed up so nicely in the gravy. She longed for a slice of the plain school-pudding, at which the big girls used to grumble so, and to which they applied such opprobrious epithets. Seeing her distaste, the lady snatched away the Bath bun, and cast it with great contempt on the counter, and then ordered some ox-tail soup for Lily, but it was so hot that it burnt her mouth, and so peppery that it brought tears into her eyes, to say nothing of its being thick, and slab, and greasy; so the end of it was that the ox-tail soup shared the fate of the bun, and the lady, in a fume, pushed Lily before her into the street again.

“Intolerable little plague!” she cried, furiously. “What am I to do with you? Comport yourself sagely, or you shall be given to the black man. Entends-tu?”

A buxom mamma in flame-coloured silk and a chinchilla tippet, who was passing with five little children laughing and prattling round her in noisy glee—they had just come out of the Adelaide, and were bound for the Industrious Fleas—looked up with surprise as she heard the voice of the handsome savage woman who had dominion over Lily. Like a prudent hen, she gathered her chicks around her in a kind of nervous tremor, lest unkindness should be contagious.

“Blessings on us all!” murmured the buxom flame-coloured mamma, as Lily and her monitress went on their way, the latter scowling. “What a Fury that woman looks! How cruelly she spoke to that innocent little darling. Priscilla, my love, mind the crossing.”

It was a very dangerous crossing—from the Golden Cross to Hungerford. Metropolitan improvements have since diminished its perils; but, in those days it was a fearful ford. That day there was a man run over. Lily could only hear a yell, and see the rush of people to the spot, and a

rapidly formed crowd with a policeman cleaving his way through it; but when the ranks of the throng opened and they came out carrying something covered with a tarpaulin, and the jolly red face of the man—a van driver, who had unwittingly done the mischief—turn, high up on his box, a yellowish white, as the crowd cried out that somebody was killed, Lily turned quite sick with terror, and, had she been old enough to swoon, would have fainted on the spot. She would have run away; but the lady's grasp was tighter than ever; and the lady herself seemed grimly interested in the catastrophe. She scanned the burden they were taking to Charing-Cross Hospital; she questioned the policeman; and but for Lily's agonised entreaties that they might go away, she would have crossed the road to the scene of the accident.

They went into a hackney-coach after this; and the lady ordered the driver to proceed to Baker-street. Lily was taken to see Madame Tussaud's famous exhibition of waxwork. Old Madame Tussaud herself was alive in those days, and a very wonderful old lady Lily thought her, in her black silk bonnet and hood, handing about those inevit-

able bills at the door. And then was there not Mr. Cobbett, looking so remarkably like life, with his broad-brimmed hat, and his spectacles, and his placid face, and breathing hard, like a benevolent grampus? And the recumbent lady with the black lace veil, whose bosom rose and fell by clockwork? And were there not the kings and queens in velvet and sham diamonds, looking quite as brilliant as real ones? And the cavaliers in armour, and M. de Voltaire with his shrivelled face, and the old coquette in her hoop and brocade? Lily was in ecstasies, and for a time forgot about the poor man who had been run over. Here were all Mangnall's questions, answered in the most splendid manner without the trouble of learning a single lesson.

The Napoleon Museum was not then in existence; but the Chamber of Horrors was already one of the lions of London. 'Twas a strange place to take a little school-girl, out for a holiday, into; but the strange lady paid the extra sixpence—I don't know whether they admit children, now—and they went inside, and supped full of horrors. That horrible guillotine. That dismal cavern where the royal victims of revolutionary ferocity bore their captivity with such dignified resignation—in

waxwork. That appalling torso in the ensanguined shirt. That gloomy dock full of murderers. Bishop and Williams were there, and Greenacre and Courvoisier; but it was too early yet for Goulds, and Hockers, and Mannings.

Lily had not been long in the Chamber of Horrors before she began to think of the man who had been run over. The air of the show seemed hot and thick. She could scarcely breathe. The glass eyes glared upon her. The sordid garments had a musty smell. She piteously besought the strange lady to take her out, promising to be very good and quiet if she would only take her away from that dreadful place.

"You are a little fool," said the lady. "*La vue de ces marauds-là m'a donné de l'appétit.*" And then, with a sharp "Come along," she led the way out of the Chamber of Horrors. "Now," she said, when they had entered another hackney-coach, "we are going to dinner, and mind you are very good, or the sweep shall come and eat you."

Lily was too big to believe in any apocryphal devouring propensities attributed to the harmless, albeit unwashed, individual who carries the soot-bag; but the lady was so very strange, and, at

times, so very fierce-looking, that she thought it not at all improbable that she herself, failing the sweep, could have done something in the child-devouring way. So Lily bowed her head, and tried to look as good as she felt.

It was a very long way to dinner. They went through a number of brilliant crowded streets, of which she did not know the names; but they were Oxford-street, Regent-street, and the Strand. Then they walked down a narrow street on to a narrow pier by the water-side. Then a man called out "Greenwich!" and they went on board a steam-boat, where, to Lily's delight, they remained a whole hour. The ships, the wherries, the wharves, the distant steeples, the bridges, the blue dome of Paul's, the towering Monument, the grey old Tower, filled her soul with joy. She forgot how frightened she was at the strange lady. She forgot how hungry she was, and was quite happy.

"To-morrow," said the strange lady, as they landed on the pier at Greenwich, and Lily followed her to a large handsome house, "to-morrow you will go to school."

"Not to-day, ma'am?" asked the child. "What will Mrs. Bunnycastle say?"

“Mrs. Bunnycastle,” returned the lady, “is a ridiculous old sheep. You are not going back to her, but to another school, where you will be taught to be very sage, and to behave yourself.”

The child was amazed, and lapsed into silence.

“What are you thinking of?” the lady asked, as they ascended the steps of a large handsome house.

“I was thinking, ma’am,” Lily answered, “of what a curious smell of hot fish there was, everywhere.”

END OF VOL. I.

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